AFTER THE BATTLE

THE HAMMELBURG RAID

Number 91

NUMBER 91

Edited by Winston G. Ramsey

European Editor: Karel Margry

Published by Battle of Britain Prints International Ltd.,
Church House, Church Street,
London E15 3JA, England

Telephone: 0181-534 8833
Fax: 0181-555 7567

Printed in Great Britain by
Plaistow Press Ltd., London E15 3JA

© Copyright 1996

After the Battle is published quarterly on the 15th of February, May, August and November.

United Kingdom Newsagent Distribution:
Seymour Press Ltd., Windsor House, 1270 London Road, Norbury, London SW16 4DH.
Telephone: 0181-679 1899

United States Distribution and Subscriptions:
RZM Imports, PO Box 995, Southbury, CT, 06488
Telephone: 1-203-264-0774

Canadian Distribution and Subscriptions:
Vanwell Publishing Ltd., 1 Northrup Crescent, St. Catharines, Ontario L2M 6P5.
Telephone: (905) 937 3100 Fax: (905) 937 1760

Australian Subscriptions and Back Issues:
Technical Book and Magazine Company, Pty, Ltd., 289-299 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000.
Telephone: 663 3951

New Zealand Distribution:
South Pacific Books (Imports) Ltd., 6 King Street, Grey Lynn, Auckland 2. Telephone: 762-142

Italian Distribution:
Tuttostoria, Casella Postale 395, 1-43100 Parma.
Telephone: 0521 290 387, Telex 532274 EDIALB I

Dutch Language Edition:
Quo Vadis, Postbus 3121, 3760 DC Soest.
Telephone: 035 6018641

CONTENTS

THE HAMMELBURG RAID 1
50 Years On 40

THE EASTERN FRONT
Smolensk 42

CRIME IN WWII
Mutiny in the Cocos Islands 48

Front cover: This Sherman on the Hammelburg live-firing range lies close to where Task Force Baum fought its last battle, and it could well be one of the ten medium tanks on the raid in March 1945. (Karel Margry)

Centre pages: Comparison of the picture (see page 25) most frequently used to illustrate the breaking into the PoW camp at Hammelburg to rescue Patton's son-in-law on March 27. In actual fact, the picture shows the subsequent entry into the camp on April 6. (Karel Margry)

Back cover: The remains of the battery on Horsburgh Island where the Cocos mutiny took place in May 1942. It resulted in the only execution of members of the British armed forces for mutiny during the Second World War. (Matthew Bryson)

Acknowledgements: The Editor acknowledges with grateful thanks the assistance of Dr Martin Mowbray, Administrator Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and Matthew Bryson of Parkville, Victoria, in the production of the feature on the mutiny on Cocos.

For their help in the preparation of the article on the Hammelburg raid, Karel Margry would like to thank, in Germany: Winfried Leipold; Hanns-Helmut Schnebel, Librarian of the Infanterieschule Hammelburg; General der Infanterie Wulff Wedde, commander of the Infantry School and Hammelburg training grounds, Hauptmann Dietmar Feist, Leiter der Gruppe Truppenübungsplatz; Oberstleutnant Günter Mertens, Presse-Offizier; Lieutenant Colonel Edward M. Bradford and Major Peter Simon, US Liaison Officers; Stefan Kunz; Josef Kirchner; and Albert Vogel; in the United States: Richard Whitaker; and in Holland: Peter Hendrikx, Jan Hey, and Father Gerard Thuring. Karel also extends his appreciation to Marco Cillessen for help with the story on Smolensk.

Photo Credits: ISH – Infanterieschule Hammelburg; RIOD – Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie; USNA – US National Archives

On March 27, 1945, a task force of the US 4th Armored Division led by Captain Abraham J. Baum liberated the PoW camp for Allied officers at Hammelburg, having fought its way 50 miles through enemy territory to get there. The expedition had been laid on by personal order of Lieutenant General George S. Patton *(above)*, commander of US Third Army. The Hammelburg raid gained notoriety for two reasons: Task Force Baum did not make it back to friendly lines but was surrounded and destroyed within 15 hours of liberating the camp; and it turned out that Patton's own son-in-law had been one of the prisoners there, generating accusations that Patton had acted out of personal interest and risked 300-odd men to rescue just one man.

The story of Task Force Baum and the Hammelburg Raid is now one of the classic stories of World War II. How Lieutenant General George S. Patton, commander of the US Third Army, sent a task force of the 4th Armored Division on an ill-starred foray deep behind German lines to liberate a PoW camp at Hammelburg — where his son-in-law, Lieutenant Colonel John K. Waters, was one of the inmates — is today well known.

The presence of Waters at Hammelburg created a long-lingering controversy. Did the action have a sound military basis or did Patton's personal interest dictate it? Was Waters incidental to the mission or was he Patton's prime motive for it? For a long time, the central question here was whether Patton knew that Waters was at Hammelburg when he ordered the raid. Although Patton fiercely denied it during his lifetime, today most historians agree that he did know, although perhaps not quite for sure.

Waters had been captured in Tunisia in February 1943, transported to Italy, and eventually moved to Poland. Early in 1945, he was known to be in a camp near Szubin (Alt Bergund). On January 21, the Germans evacuated the camp, marching 1,400 Americans westwards. Three of these — Captain Ernest M. Gruenberg, and 2nd Lieutenants Frank H. Colley and John N. Dimmling — escaped from the column and made their way east, crossing Russian lines on the 24th. They reached Moscow and reported to General John R. Deane, chief of the US Military Mission. Theirs was the first news of the evacuation of the camp. Among numerous other names, they passed on that of Waters as one of the Americans included in the move west. On February 9, Deane sent a telegram to Eisenhower for Patton passing on this information. Meanwhile, the Red Army had overrun the camp and confirmed that it was empty. On February 23, the news having reached Washington, Secretary of State Cordell Hull advised Patton of the Russian advance and said there was no knowledge of Waters' new location. Since then, Allied intelligence had established that Hammelburg was a principal camp for captured Allied officers, that it held about 4,700 inmates, among them some 1,500 Americans, and that many of those at Szubin had been transferred to Hammelburg. Thus, there was a good chance that Waters was there, but no certainty.

Patton's son-in-law was Lieutenant Colonel John K. Waters. Born in 1906, son of a Baltimore banker, Waters had graduated from West Point as a 2nd lieutenant in the cavalry in 1931 and married Patton's daughter Beatrice on June 27, 1934. Reserved, self-contained, intelligent and with a high sense of duty, he seemed bound for high command, but his career was rudely interrupted when, serving as Executive Officer of the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment of the 1st Armored Division, he was captured by Rommel's Afrikakorps at Djebel Lessouda during the Battle of Kasserine on February 14, 1943. Imprisoned at Oflag 64 at Szubin in Poland, he was evacuated westwards along with 1,400 other Americans on January 21, 1945, arriving at Oflag XIII-B, Hammelburg, on March 8. Although Patton always denied having known that Waters was at Hammelburg, it is now known that he had received intelligence information that gave him good reason to believe so.

THE HAMMELBURG RAID

By Karel Margry

The day that Third Army was across the Rhine, on March 23, Patton wrote to his wife Beatrice: 'We are headed right for John's place and may get there before he is moved'. On the 25th, he wrote: 'Hope to send an expedition tomorrow to get John'. Regardless whether Patton was sure or not that Waters was at Hammelburg, these letter entries clearly show that freeing his son-in-law was a prime motive for the raid.

Officially, Patton had two reasons for the expedition: firstly, to feint the Germans away from the direction of his next major thrust; and, secondly, to free all of the Hammelburg prisoners. As for the feint: Third Army had orders to switch to the north to help US First Army encircle the Ruhr, and a thrust to Hammelburg might deceive the Germans into thinking Third Army was going east rather than north. As for the prisoners, Patton held a sincere concern that they might be murdered by the retreating Germans. There was another motive too: a month earlier, in the Philippines, General Douglas MacArthur had gained much publicity by taking the prison camps of Santo Tomas and Bilibid in Manila, liberating 5,000 people. Always avid to outdo his rivals, Patton is reported to have said that he would make MacArthur look like a piker.

Patton cleared the mission with his immediate superior, General Omar N. Bradley of US 12th Army Group. After the war, Bradley claimed he 'did not learn of the expedition until it had been on the road two days', adding: 'Certainly, had George consulted me on the mission, I would have forbidden him to stage it'. However, the diary of Bradley's aide, Lieutenant Colonel Chester B. Hansen, proves otherwise. An entry for April 28 reads: 'When Patton ran off on his mission the other day, Brad told him he would allow it provided Patton did not become involved. He was ordered to withdraw if he did to prevent him from becoming entangled in the wrong direction.'

No pictures exist of the actual Hammelburg raid: there was no US Army photographer with TF Baum and no snapshot taken by any task force member has ever surfaced. However, units of the US Seventh Army advanced over the same ground later and the pictures taken then can be used to illustrate Baum's route. Some of them relate directly to incidents that occurred when Baum was there. *Top:* **This picture was taken on April 6, ten days after the ill-starred foray, when the camp was again liberated, this time for good, by the US 14th Armored Division. (USNA)**

The formation selected to carry out the mission was the 4th Armored Division, commanded by Brigadier General William Hoge *(left)*. An Engineer Corps officer with a reputation for plain speaking, Hoge had commanded the Provisional Engineer Special Brigade Group on Omaha Beach on D-Day. He had been given command of Combat Command B of the 9th Armored Division on November 4, 1944. Under him, CCB had distinguished itself in the Ardennes and captured the Remagen bridge on March 7, 1945. Promoted to command of the 4th Armored on March 21, Hoge had been in this position only four days when the Hammelburg mission came up. Hoge was against it, but had to yield to direct orders from Patton. *Right:* In the afternoon of March 25, CCB of the 4th Armored had captured the railway bridge across the Main river at Nilkheim, just south of Aschaffenburg. The small bridgehead formed became the starting point for the operation two nights later.

On March 24, Patton phoned Major General Manton S. Eddy of XII Corps and told him he wanted a special expedition sent about 60 miles behind enemy lines to free 'some 900' American prisoners at Hammelburg. (Though US intelligence had accurately put the number of PoWs at about 1,500, Patton for some reason believed it was 900.) Patton's idea was to send a combat command — i.e. half an armoured division, about 4,000 men and 150 tanks. Eddy did not like Patton's plan. He thought it too risky. Troops sent independently and deep into enemy territory could easily be surrounded and destroyed. Not wanting to jeopardize a whole combat command, he argued that a smaller force had a better chance of success: fewer vehicles meant quicker movement, more surprise, and a better chance of escaping detection and getting back. Against his better judgement, Patton let himself be convinced. Instead of a combat command, he agreed to send a two-company task force — a force over ten times smaller than what he originally envisaged.

The formation best placed for the mission was the 4th Armored Division, which had just crossed the Rhine and was advancing to the next barrier, the Main river. Eddy telephoned the 4th Armored commander, Brigadier General William M. Hoge, at his command post at Leeheim. Hoge was new to the 4th Armored, and to Third Army, having been appointed only four days before. Hoge did not like the mission any better than Eddy, but his reaction was different: his opinion was that a small force stood no chance of success; if it had to be done, it better be by a full combat command. Hoge had other objections too: his troops were exhausted after 36 hours of intense combat; and the 4th Armored had orders to go north with the rest of Third Army, so it would be unable to follow up the task force once it was launched. Eddy promised he would explain Hoge's reluctance to Patton.

Next day, March 25, Combat Command B (CCB) of the 4th Armored reached the Main river opposite Aschaffenburg and captured a railway bridge across the river at Nilkheim, just south-west of the city, forming a small bridgehead. This presented Patton with the opportunity he was looking for.

Later that day, Major Alexander C. Stiller, one of Patton's aides, unexpectedly appeared at Hoge's HQ, now at Rossdorf, announcing that he was 'to go along' on the Hammelburg expedition. (Because he knew Waters and could identify him, Patton had *asked* Stiller whether he would like to accompany the raid. Stiller had taken this as an order.) Stiller's announcement surprised Hoge as he thought the mission had been shelved. He phoned Eddy who told him not to worry: he would handle Patton.

Early on the 26th, Patton flew up to Eddy's HQ intending to order him to launch the task force to Hammelburg. Eddy, however, was absent, so Patton called Hoge and gave him the order directly. When Hoge protested, Patton said in a pleading tone which Hoge found embarrassing: 'Bill, I'll promise I'll replace anything you lose — every man, every tank, every half-track. I promise.' Hoge couldn't understand why Patton was so determined to free the Hammelburg camp. It was then that Stiller, who was still with Hoge and listening in, revealed to him that Patton's son-in-law was one of the prisoners.

Forced to obey Patton's direct order, Hoge phoned Lieutenant Colonel Creighton W. Abrams, the commander of CCB, to pass on the order (but keeping silent about Waters). Abrams' reaction was exactly like Hoge's: 50 miles was a long way for a small task force; if the mission had to be, he wanted his whole combat command to go.

The men charged with preparing the Hammelburg mission were Colonel Creighton W. Abrams, commander of CCB (left), and Lieutenant Colonel Harold Cohen, CO of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion (right), seen here celebrating the capture of the Nilkheim bridge. Like nearly everyone else, they thought it a suicide mission and did not understand what was so important about Hammelburg. Originally, Cohen was to have led the mission but he was prevented from going by a bad case of piles.

Later that morning, at 1000, Patton appeared at CCB's command post, accompanied by Hoge and Stiller. Again, Patton overruled all suggestions of a combat command, and only wanted to know who was to lead the task force. Abrams' original choice was Lieutenant Colonel Harold Cohen of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, but the latter was troubled by a bad case of haemorrhoids. Patton, Hoge, Stiller and Abrams all drove down to the battalion CP, where Patton proceeded to personally inspect Cohen's rear end. ('That is some sorry ass', he is reported to have said.)

It was obvious Cohen could not go; the unit doctor had in fact already ordered him hospitalised for treatment. To replace him, Cohen suggested his S-3 (Operations Officer), Captain Abraham J. Baum. Tall, red-haired, 24-year-old Baum was an experienced leader who knew what war was about. Anything but subtle, he approached any combat problem in an aggressive, direct way.

Pulling Baum aside, Patton said: 'Listen Abe — it is Abe, isn't it? I thought so. You pull this off and I'll see to it that you get the Congressional Medal of Honor.'

'I have my orders, Sir. You don't have to bribe me', Baum answered.

Patton and Hoge left, leaving Stiller to fill Abrams, Cohen and Baum in on the mission. Baum was to take the most direct route to Hammelburg, liberate the camp, load all vehicles to capacity with freed officers for the return trip, and give the remaining prisoners the choice of accompanying the task force on foot or making their way on their own to friendly lines. Stiller said the camp contained 'about 300' American officers. (Why his figure was 1,200 lower than that given by Intelligence, and 600 lower than what Patton thought, has never been explained.) The camp's precise location in relation to the town was not known; Baum would have to glean that from civilians. Once Baum was on his way, the division would move north with the rest of Third Army, so he would be completely on his own. He would get whatever air support he needed, weather permitting; and US Seventh Army, which would take over the sector, would be ready to help the task force getting back.

The briefing over, Stiller again announced that he was going to personally accompany the expedition. The others were much surprised by this new development. Stiller outranked Baum, but he quickly conceded that Baum would be the one in command, saying: 'The general wants me to get a taste of combat. I'm only going along for the laughs and a high old time'. The others remained suspicious. Stiller, a tough-looking former Texas Ranger, did not look like he needed a seasoning at all. Something here did not make sense.

Although his initial remark was hoodwinking, Stiller was not really being secretive about his true reason for coming along. Later in the day, he told both Colonel Abrams and Captain Carter Ogden, the 37th Tank Battalion supply officer, about Patton's son-in-law being a prisoner at Hammelburg.

Although the facts surrounding the Waters controversy and how the order for the raid came about have now largely been solved, it is remarkable how, on a tactical level, many of the basic facts and figures of the Hammelburg operation remain uncertain. Also, published accounts contain many inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Fortunately, research by local German historians in the last decade, and testimony from German witnesses, enable one to correct these and to add many new details. What follows is a synthesis of all available knowledge.

In essence, the task force consisted of only two companies, one from the 37th Tank Battalion and one from the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion. The detailed order of battle was: C Company of the 37th with ten M4A3 (76mm) Sherman tanks led by 2nd Lieutenant William J. Nutto; a platoon of six 37mm M5A1 Stuart light tanks from D Company of the 37th under 2nd Lieutenant William G. Weaver Jr; a platoon of three 105mm M7 self-propelled assault guns (organic to the 10th Armored Infantry) under Tech/Sergeant Charles O. Graham; Company A of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, led by Captain Robert F. Lange, in 27 half-tracks (one of these half-tracks carried spare fuel, and others extra supplies and ammunition; one was a tank maintenance vehicle; one was the 10th's S-4 truck, which was equipped with a powerful, morse-key radio, operated by Tech/4 John W. Sidles); then there was the reconnaissance platoon of the 10th consisting of nine men in three Jeeps led by 2nd Lieutenant Norman F. Hoffner; and finally a command group consisting of Baum's Jeep; that of his assistant, Sergeant Ellis Wise; that of his maintenance officer, 1st Lieutenant Walter W. Wrolson; Stiller's Jeep; and a medical Jeep.

In all, ten medium tanks, six light tanks, three SP assault guns, 27 half-tracks, and eight Jeeps — a total of 54 vehicles. However, there is some discrepancy over the exact number of Jeeps: some sources say Stiller rode in Baum's Jeep and did not have one of his own; some say the medical vehicle was not a Jeep, but a tracked M29 Weasel.

The exact number of men is also not clear. Most accounts give the total as 293 men: six officers and 209 men from the 10th, four officers and 73 men from the 37th, plus Stiller. However, this is in fact the number of men as reported missing on April 6, ten days after the mission, and does not include those few that had meanwhile made it back to friendly lines. Official US Army historian Martin Blumenson, apparently on the basis of other sources, gives a total of 307 men.

All officers and men were battle-weary and exhausted. They had slept only one night in the past four. At 1700, Baum briefed his unit commanders. Only 15 maps were available, marked with the route. The men loaded their half-tracks with ammo and supplies and as much extra fuel cans as they could carry.

The man to finally lead the expedition was Cohen's S-3, Captain Abraham J. Baum. Born on March 21, 1921, in the Bronx, of Jewish descent, Baum worked as a pattern cutter in the New York garment industry. When he volunteered in December 1941, the recruiting sergeant, thinking he was a *tool* cutter, assigned him to the Engineer Corps. From basic training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, he went to engineer training at Fort Benning, Georgia, from where he was assigned to the 2nd Armored Division. In 1942, he applied for Officer Candidate School. Commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, he joined the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 4th Armored Division. Landing in Normandy with the division on July 12, 1944, he fought with them across France, Belgium and into Germany. Before Hammelburg, he had already earned two Silver and two Bronze Stars.

In order to identify his son-in-law, Patton asked one of his personal aides, Major Alexander C. Stiller, who knew Waters, to accompany the task force. Stiller — seen here (far left) with Brigadier General Hobart R. Gay, Patton's chief-of-staff; Patton, and Major Charles R. Codman, Patton's other aide, in Sicily in 1943 — had served with Patton in World War I. Between the wars, he had been a Texas Ranger. He had reenlisted in 1941 in the hope of fighting again with Patton, writing to him asking for an assignment. He had been with Patton since North Africa. Totally dedicated, he had taken Patton's request as an order. Although evasive at first, he did not really hide the reason for his coming along, disclosing it to Hoge, Abrams and Baum before the operation. Stiller outranked Baum but he took care not to interfere with Baum's command decisions. When Baum's infantry officers became casualties, he volunteered to lead a platoon in the assault on the PoW camp.

Hammelburg lay some 50 miles behind enemy lines. Baum's plan was to follow the main road east from Aschaffenburg — the B26 — as far as Gemünden, then change to the B27 for Hammelburg. The first part of the route led through the rolling country and woods of the Spessart Hills to the town of Lohr. From there, it followed the narrow valley of the Main river to Gemünden, where Baum needed to cross the Fränkische Saale river in order to pick up the B27. The problem lay at the beginning of the route. Aschaffenburg itself was stubbornly defended by the 36. Volksgrenadier-Division and other troops under the city's Kampfkommandant, Major Emil Lamberth (it would not fall until nine days later, April 3). Since Aschaffenburg was such a hornet's nest, Task Force Baum would have to go around it, through the village of Schweinheim, two miles to the south-east of the big town. To open the way, a tank/infantry force of CCB was to attack Schweinheim late on March 26.

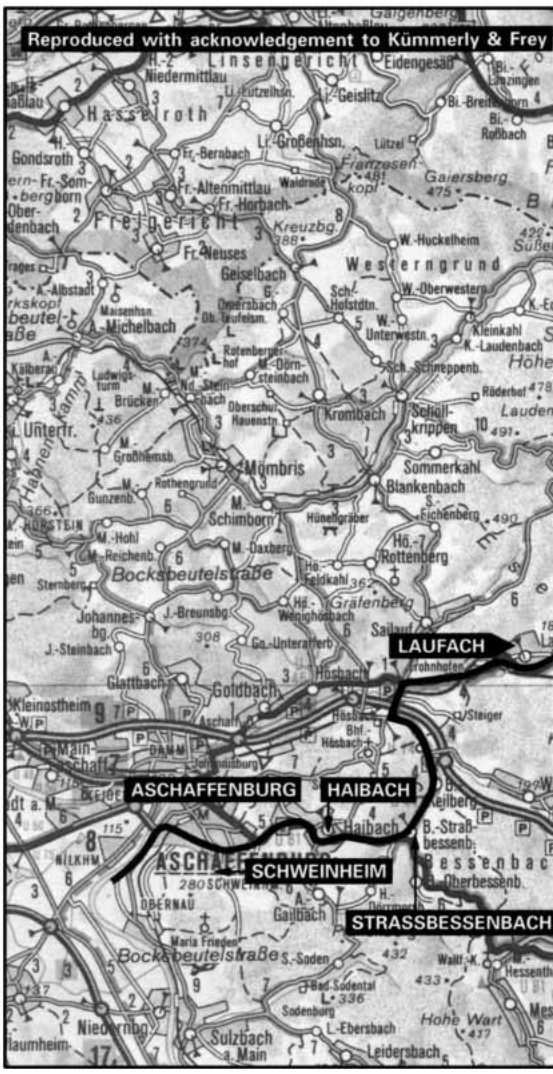
The take-off point for Task Force Baum was CCB's little bridgehead over the Main below Aschaffenburg. To help Baum break out of there, CCB had ordered an evening attack on the village of Schweinheim, in a valley just south-east of Aschaffenburg. The main road to Hammelburg was the B26 running east from Aschaffenburg, but because that town was still strongly held by the Germans, Baum would have to take off through Schweinheim, skirt around Aschaffenburg and pick up the B26 east of it. The breach had to be made quickly, in no more than an hour, or else Baum would not be able to reach Hammelburg under cover of darkness.

At 2030, the 22nd, 66th and 94th Armored Artillery Battalions began a TOT (time on target) shelling of the village. At 2100, the artillery lifted and B Company of the 37th Tanks (Captain Richard Pancake) and B Company of the 10th Armored Infantry (Captain Adrian Tessier) attacked. Their task was to clear the main street, so that Baum's force could pass through and get started on its mission.

The village had been reported lightly held, but resistance proved much stronger than expected, the German defenders being young officer cadets who fought bravely and fanatically. Descending down the road into the village, the lead Sherman was knocked out by a Panzerfaust (the German hand-held anti-tank grenade launcher) within 100 yards of the first building. It blocked the road. The infantry riding on the tanks jumped off and began clearing the street house by house. Meanwhile, Corporal Lester Powell, the company clerk, entered the burning tank and steered it onto the right pavement, then rescued the one crew member still alive in the tank. With Panzerfausts being fired from all directions and German machine guns firing, the sergeant in command of the second Sherman drove on, swinging his turret from side to side and spraying the buildings with machine gun fire and 76mm shells, until he was through the town. Another tank platoon of three Shermans moved in to seal off the side streets. The platoon leader's Sherman, dodging into a street on the left, was hit by a grenade dropped from a roof, its crew jumping out for fear it might burst into flames. Before they could get back in, four young Germans entered the tank and turned its gun on the Americans, setting fire to a house. Meanwhile, at the rear, a third Sherman had been hit, trapping those in front. The infantry with the tanks kept the Germans at bay until the crew of the rear tank got it running again and backed it out.

Meanwhile, Task Force Baum stood waiting on the hill above Schweinheim, Baum himself pacing back and forth frustrated and angry at the delay. It was during this wait that Baum too learned from Stiller about Waters' presence at Hammelburg. Baum felt outraged that Patton would risk the lives of hundreds of men just to get one man out, but he quickly resolved that he had no choice but to regard it as a job to be done. However, if word about Waters would reach his men, the effect on morale could be disastrous. At 2330, Schweinheim was still not clear. Baum told his men to mount up and get ready, then drove down into Schweinheim to tell Pancake and Tessier that he could not wait any longer and was coming through.

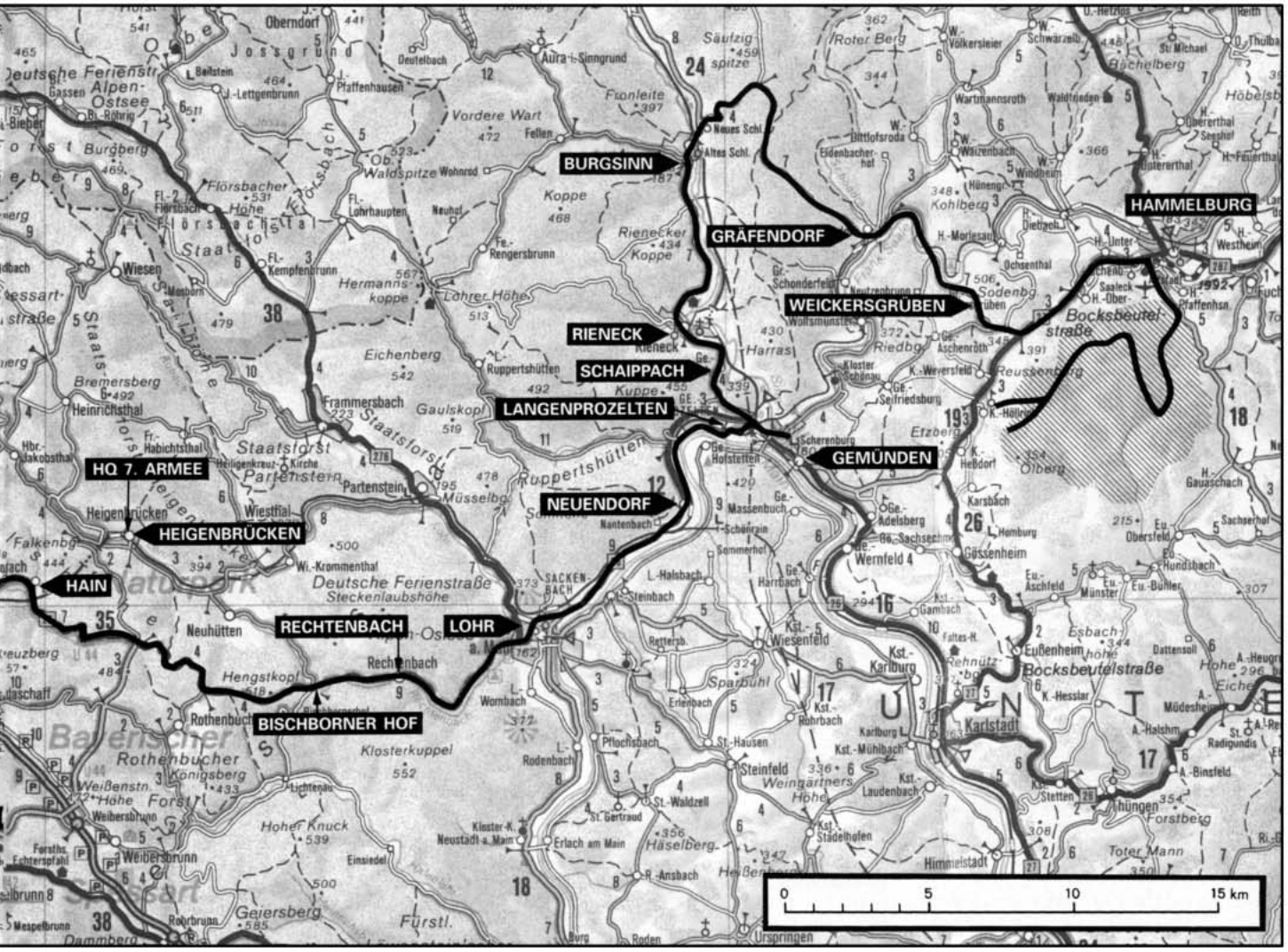
The column began to move, the light tanks in the lead, then the Jeeps, the Shermans, the half-tracks, the assault guns, and the maintenance vehicles bringing up the rear. Leading the whole column was Staff Sergeant Robert Vannett in his light tank *Conquering Hero* (Lieutenant Weaver, the light tank platoon leader, was riding in the co-driver's seat). With hatch covers open, and sirens yelling for good effect, the tanks clanked down the road, the drivers guiding on the tiny specks of the black-out lights and the blue exhaust glow of the tank ahead. As the column entered the embattled village, the shooting slackened momentarily. The main road through the village was over a mile long and curvy. The task force barrelled through at full speed, past the burning houses and the Shermans at the intersections, and out the other end.



As Baum's force exited Schweinheim, the German front line closed behind them. Soon, they passed beyond the range of artillery support. They were on their own. Their only link with division now was by radio. Soon, they would be out of range of the division wireless net too, but CCB had arranged that an L-5 liaison plane would be in the air to relay radio messages back to the 10th Armored Infantry which woul pass them on to higher up.

As their colleagues of B Company, 37th Tanks, and B Company, 10th Armored Infantry, prepared to attack Schweinheim from the hill overlooking the village, Baum's task force formed up here, a little further back, on the road leading from the Nilkheim railway bridge up to the hill. The attack started at 2100 hours. The arrows show the direction of advance.

Stoutly defended by a platoon of Grenadier-Ersatz- und Ausbildungs-Bataillon 106 and a force of teenage reserve officer cadets, Schweinheim proved much tougher than expected. The lead Sherman was knocked out by a Panzerfaust here, at the entrance of the village, just before the road begins to drop down to the centre.



Shortly after Baum's column disappeared in the darkness, the two B Companies, their task accomplished, extricated from Schweinheim, the place they would afterwards call 'Bazooka City'. They had taken 35 prisoners, but lost six tanks. Tomorrow, CCB and the rest of the 4th Armored Division would turn over the Aschaffenburg sector to the Seventh Army and move north with the rest of Third Army, away from Task Force Baum moving east into enemy territory.

It was past midnight. The delay at Schweinheim had cost Baum three valuable hours. The first task now was to find the way to the B26, the main road east. The column moved through the next village, Haibach. Here, small-arms fire and Panzerfausts hit the speeding column, causing some casualties among the men in the vehicles. As he would do in all the towns along the route where there was any enemy fire, Baum gave the command to fire back, shooting at any place which looked suspicious. No high-explosive shells were fired by the tanks at night while passing through the towns because the column would have to stop. At Haibach, the American fire set several houses alight.

In the next village, Grünmorsbach, the column halted shortly while Baum and Wise consulted the map. There was no fighting here and, in the moonlight, the men threw down cigarettes and biscuits to the locals who had come out to see the Americans.

It took costly hours to secure the route through the village centre *(left)*. **Four more Shermans of B Company were hit by Panzerfausts, and one captured intact by the Germans, who promptly turned its gun on the Americans. The 4th Armored tankers judged the German defence of little Schweinheim so tough that they dubbed it 'Bazooky City'.**

Schweinheim delayed Baum's departure by three hours. It was midnight, March 26/27, before he could push his force, which consisted of a company of tanks and a company of armoured infantry, through the mile-long village, his route through being Althohlstrasse – Gailbacher Strasse – Dümpelsmühle – Würzburger Strasse (the B8). *Right:* **This is Althohlstrasse.**

Left: **Five miles on, at Strassbessenbach, Baum found the turn-off to the north which he needed in order to get to the B26, the main road east from Aschaffenburg. Stopping his Jeep at the turn, Baum sized up his column as it rumbled past in the darkness.** *Right:* **Another four miles and the column reached the highway near Hösbach Station, turning right towards Hammelburg.**

At about 0130 and five miles from Schweinheim, they reached Strassbessenbach, where they turned north to Keilberg. Baum waited at the turn to inspect the mile-long column as it passed. Then he sped forward, to follow directly behind Lieutenant Weaver in *Conquering Hero*. At 0230, the column reached the junction with Highway B26 at Bahnhof Hösbach, where they turned east. It had taken two and a half hours to cover the nine miles, but finding the way from Schweinheim to the B26 in the dark with an armoured column along a curvy and unfamiliar route was a remarkable accomplishment in itself.

Now firmly on the main road to Hammelburg, Baum felt better. Ordering the column to hit top speed, he constantly drove his Jeep forward, dropping back, then forward again, so that he could keep control, and inspire confidence in his men. In order to disrupt enemy communications, and preclude advance warnings to the German rear area, Baum ordered the lead tanks to knock down telephone poles along the road, and the infantrymen in the rear half-tracks to cut the wires. This was repeated at several places along the route. However, the warning of their advent had already been telephoned back from town to town as far as Lohr, 20 miles further east, and in almost every village intermittent rifle fire hit the column.

They passed through Frohnhofen and the larger village of Laufach. At the exit of Laufach, the point of the column ran into a unit of 400 Luftwaffe soldiers who were on their way to the Aschaffenburg front and came unsuspectingly marching down the road. Realising their mistake, the Germans opened fire, an NCO firing off a Panzerfaust which halted the American column. Baum's men fired back, completely dispersing the German unit. Five Germans and one American were killed. Lieutenant Weaver told the captured soldiers to put their rifles in the road and then drove his light tank over the weapons, crushing them. The Americans instructed the cowed soldiers to march west and surrender to the approaching American army.

Beyond the next village, Hain, the road began to climb, entering a vast forested area which extended all the way to Lohr, 15 miles further on. Three miles into the forest, as he sped past the ridge-top crossroads of Siebenwegen, Baum was unaware that only three miles to the north, in the village of Heigenbrücken, was the headquarters of the German 7. Armee, responsible for the whole front opposing Third Army. Only a few hours before, this army had received a new commander, General der Infanterie Hans von Obstfelder replacing General der Infanterie Hans Felber. Both men, and the army chief-of-staff, Generalmajor Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff, were in the command post at Heigenbrücken. Von Obstfelder had already received several disconnected reports about the American column that had broken out from Schweinheim. He knew it was proceeding east, but not whether an army was following it, nor its present location. Suddenly, near 0600, an aide burst into the CP excitedly announcing that American tanks were on the B26 close by. Running outside, von Obstfelder and the others could faintly hear the roar of heavy vehicles coming from the forest above them. They were heading east, towards Lohr. (Many American accounts err by saying the 7. Armee HQ was located *at* Lohr, and that von Obstfelder actually *saw* Baum's column from that town.)

Quickly, von Obstfelder issued a series of orders: he ordered a squadron of reconnaissance planes to find and report on the strength and location of the enemy column. The area behind his army's front was part of Wehrkreis (Home Defence Area) XIII with headquarters at Nuremberg. He contacted the Wehrkreis commander, General der Infanterie Karl Weisenberger, and asked him to mobilise all available troops to stop the roving enemy column. At the code-word 'Leuthen', the Wehrkreis' training and depot units, and some armoured and motorised infantry units at Schweinfurt, the latter under Oberst Dietrich Freiherr von Massenbach, were to assemble into the 413. Division zbV. Von Massenbach had a tank destroyer unit (probably remnants of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 251) stationed at Meiningen, 45 miles north-east of Hammelburg, and this he ordered to proceed to Hammelburg at once. Also alerted were the Wehrmacht Infantry School at Grafenwöhr, 100 miles east-south-east of Hammelburg, which sent off a group of 60-70 officer cadets under Hauptmann Franz Gehrig in two busses, and the Reserve-Offizier-Bewerber(ROB)-Lehrgang XIII (the Wehrkreis' reserve officer cadet course) at Ansbach, 65 miles south-east of Hammelburg, which despatched some 80 cadets.

At the exit of Laufach, the column ran into some 400 Luftwaffe soldiers on their way to the Aschaffenburg front. In a short fight, the German group was broken up. Prisoners taken by TF Baum along the way were either taken along on the tanks or told to march westwards and surrender to the oncoming American army. The road leading off to the right is the post-war bypass which today takes the B26 round the village.

As he passed the ridge-top crossroads of Siebenwegen in the dense Spessart forest, Baum was unaware that only a few miles away to the left, down below at Heigenbrücken, was the headquarters of the German 7. Armee. Hearing the American column roar by, the German army commander, General Hans von Obstfelder, was able to set in motion measures to monitor and counter the probing enemy column.

Left: **Halfway through the forest, at Bischborner Hof, Baum's force suddenly found itself passing a German military camp with troops doing morning exercise on a parade ground field, and, without slowing down, decimated the enemy soldiers with hardly a shot being fired in return. The parade ground was part of a camp formerly used by the Reich Labour Service, RAD-Lager 4/285.** *Right:* **The foundations of the work camp huts survive in the woods behind the inn.**

Unaware that counter-measures had been set in motion, the Americans rolled on. In the first light of dawn, they were met by a quite unexpected sight. Rolling along the B26, they passed a German military installation with a large contingent of troops on a parade ground doing morning calisthenics, with their rifles stacked nearby. As they roared by, the Americans sprayed the Germans with machine gun fire, completely decimating them. Many Germans fell, although a few managed to open return fire on the column's rear vehicles.

Most American accounts place this incident somewhere between Frohnhofen and Laufach. However, the only military-type establishment along the B26 was a hutted camp of the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service), known as RAD-Lager 4/285, which was located at Bischborner Hof, a roadside inn in a forest clearing, about halfway through the forest and some ten miles beyond Laufach. The incident almost certainly took place here.

Speeding through the next village, Rechtenbach, Baum realised that the shooting-up of the parade ground had given away the location of his force to the Germans. Therefore, and because he was approaching the town of Lohr he put the more-heavily armoured Shermans in the lead. Lohr was the largest town so far and already about half the distance to Hammelburg. The town lay in a valley and the road descended from the woods into it.

In the early dawn, Baum's force reached Lohr, the biggest town so far. This picture was taken on April 3, seven days later, when the 14th Armored Division followed in Baum's footsteps, and shows the entrance to the town. The B26 highway, at this point called Rechtenbacher Strasse, runs in the foreground; the town centre and Hammelburg are to the left. Baum's tanks did not disperse as the Shermans in this picture, but stayed on the road. (USNA)

The floor of the Rechtenbach valley has been completely developed with new housing. The distinctive garden gate and steps on this side remain, although Karel had some difficulty getting the house proprietress to allow him in to take a comparison.

A few yards nearer to the town, TF Baum lost its first tank. At this spot on Rechtenbacher Strasse, the local Volkssturm had erected a road-block, and Baum's lead Sherman was disabled by a Panzerfaust fired by one of its defenders. The large building in the curve was then the Stadthaus and local NSDAP headquarters. Today, it houses the local branch of the German Red Cross.

Early that morning, the local German HQ, led by NSDAP-Kreisleiter Eduard Röss, had received word that '40 enemy tanks' were approaching the town. The message had caused great consternation. Just at the entrance to the town, the Germans had built a single road-block, consisting of an overturned heavy truck with telephone poles in front of it, but apart from that the town was undefended.

As the lead Sherman approached the barricade, it was hit by a Panzerfaust which immobilised it. One crew member was killed, the others managed to bail out. Task Force Baum had lost its first tank.

No pictures exist of that knocked-out tank but seven days later, Signal Corps photographer Tech/4 Sidney Blau pictured two other brewed-up Shermans less than 300 yards further down into Lohr. Belonging to the 14th Armored Division, they too had been hit by a Panzerfaust when venturing into the town on April 2. (USNA)

A short fight broke out. The second Sherman opened up with its 76mm gun and machine guns, scattering the defenders, then bulldozed the road-block aside. The road through Lohr was clear. It was now about 0600.

As they proceeded through the town with Weaver's light tanks again in the lead, the force saw a column of 12 Wehrmacht vehicles coming towards it. (The exact composition of this column is unclear: early American accounts spoke only of 'vehicles'; later versions changed this to '12 trucks towing 88mm anti-aircraft guns'; some accounts have the column led by two German tanks.) As they were about to pass the first vehicle, the American lead tanks opened up with their machine guns and completely shot up the German convoy. One truck caught fire. Those in the trucks came diving over the sides. As he sped by, Lieutenant Weaver to his horror saw a girl falling from a lorry, her cap off, blond hair flying. The sight made him sick and he vomited.

Although the Sherman crashed into the window of his Metzgerei (butcher shop), Franz Mayer is still in business on Hauptstrasse 43, the shop façade still retaining the original lettering. In the aftermath of the Hammelburg operation, the NSDAP-Kreisleiter of Lohr, Eduard Röss, only narrowly escaped being tried by a 'flying court-martial' for not having defended Lohr more stoutly with his Volkssturm troops, and this probably was one cause for the much more aggressive defence of the town six days later. TF Baum passed through Lohr with machine guns blazing, so the bullet marks on the walls could equally be of March 27. (USNA)

According to American accounts, the occupants of these vehicles were German flak girls. However, local German research has unearthed a truth that is somewhat different. It seems three incidents at Lohr have merged into one. Just prior to their encounter with the vehicles, as Baum's column was passing the Hotel Krone in the centre of the town, they shot a German female auxiliary (probably a Nachrichtenhelferin (switchboard operator) belonging to a staff HQ in the hotel) on the pavement outside. Then, some 300 yards further on, opposite the Sportplatz at the eastern exit of the town, they shot up a camouflaged truck loaded with tank tracks which stood by the side of the road. It was not a Wehrmacht truck, but belonged to the Organisation Todt (the Reich central construction agency). Six people — two OT men, four civilian labourers, a woman and her 8-year-old daughter — were killed here. It was almost certainly these women — the WAC at the hotel and the mother and daughter killed near the OT truck — which led to the story of the flak girls, and this in turn may explain the appearance of the 88mm guns in the later accounts.

At the exit of Lohr, a big river appeared on the task force's right. This was the Main, the same river they had set out from 25 miles back (flowing north from Würzburg, the river curves in a large horizontal S via Gemünden and Lohr to Aschaffenburg). Just about where his light tanks hit the OT truck, Lieutenant Weaver spotted two tugboats with barges in tow sailing upstream towards the sluice at Steinbach. Incendiary and HE shells from the light tanks blew up the barges and set a tug on fire. The boat's crew was seen to jump off and swim to the far shore.

Left: **Today, a bypass road carries the B26 around Lohr but in 1945 Baum had to go straight through the town. As the column made the turn into Lohrtor-Strasse, the fire from the column killed a German female auxiliary on the pavement outside the Hotel Krone (centre). It is said the Americans were returning rifle fire from one of the hotel's windows.**

Right: **A few hundred yards further on, opposite the local sports field, Baum's tanks shot up a camouflaged but non-military lorry — killing six people including a mother and daughter child — and then wrecked a column of 12 Wehrmacht trucks. The women killed in these incidents led the Americans to think they had slaughtered a convoy of German flak girls.**

Left: **Beyond Lohr, the B26 enters the narrow Main valley and for a distance of some seven miles, the road, railway and river all run parallel close to one another. Here, and all the way to Gemünden, Baum's tanks had a field day shooting up German military trains which were unsuspectingly on their way to or from the Aschaffenburg front or marshalling at Gemünden. The first train was in fact driving in the same direction as Baum's column, the fast light tanks (an M5 could do 36 mph) actually overtaking it and firing at it on the run. The Germans returned fire from train windows and freight cars doors, until Pfc Frank Malinski, gunner of *Conquering Hero*, stopped the train by putting a 37mm shell through the locomotive, then destroying it by putting one in a boxcar full of ammo.** *Right:* **A little further on, just before Neuendorf, the road crossed the railway to its northern side. Seeing a second train approach from Gemünden, another M5, *City of New York*, positioned itself next to the level crossing and derailed its locomotive with a head-on shot. Today, the crossing no longer exists, the B26 now bypassing Neuendorf and crossing the railway east of it. This is where it used to be, as seen from the north side of the tracks looking east.**

opened to reveal small AA guns. Just then, the road dipped, which put the American tanks below the level of the train, too low for the German guns to hit them, but not the other way round. The first 37mm shell hit the boiler of the train's locomotive, bringing it to a hissing halt. A second hit a boxcar full of ammunition which exploded in a sheet of flame, leaving only the undercarriage. From the half-tracks, men hurled thermite grenades at the train.

A little further on, just before Neuendorf, the road crossed the railway. Sergeant Donald Yoerk, commanding *City of New York*, the light tank behind Weaver's, saw a second train approaching the crossing from Gemünden. Lest this train cut the column in half, Yoerk stopped his tank near the crossing for a head-on shot at the oncoming train. His second shell wrecked the locomotive's undercarriage, and the crippled train ploughed off the rails into the roadbed well before the level crossing. This train turned out to be a 30-car flak train loaded with anti-aircraft guns set in concrete pillboxes.

Unfortunately, trees hide both the Main river and Langenprozelten from view today, and a high wire fence bars climbing the slope on the left, but the oncoming train makes for a good stand-in.

The train stopped at the Neuendorf level crossing turned out to be a big trophy: a 30-wagon flak train, with its multiple AA guns set in concrete pillboxes. From their half-tracks, Baum's infantrymen threw in thermite grenades to further neutralise the train's armament. When Tech/4 Blau photographed this same train eight days later, he was unaware of what had happened and mistakenly noted in his caption that it had been crippled by US dive-bombers. (Yet another example of the need to check official captions 'on the ground'.) The village in the distance is Langenprozelten. (USNA)

The column now entered the narrow river valley. Along it, all the way from Lohr to Gemünden, a double-track railway runs parallel with the road and river. As the column raced on, the light tanks in the lead began overtaking a train chugging along on their left. German soldiers at the windows stopped waving when they saw the main gun and machine guns of Weaver's *Conquering Hero* turn towards them. Rifles poked through the windows, and doors of the train's boxcars

If it wasn't for the M5 brewing up ahead, this could be Task Force Baum passing through Langenprozelten. Baum had had no trouble here on March 27. These tanks belong to the 47th Tank Battalion of 14th Armored Division which came through the village on April 4. (USNA)

Past Langenprozelten, the railway widened out to become the huge Gemünden marshalling yards. From the road, Baum's tanks poured shells down the tracks, shooting up several other locomotives and wreaking devastation among the helplessly stranded trains. As far as Baum could estimate, there were about 12 of them each consisting of about 20 cars. Seeing all the trains, Baum realised he had 'run into something'. He radioed his first report back to the 10th Armored Infantry. It was a message for the air corps: 'Tell air of enemy troops marshalling yards at Gemünden.' By now, he was beyond wireless range but, as arranged, the L-5 liaison plane was in the air to relay the message. Back at headquarters, this first report was received with glee for another reason: Gemünden was 32 road miles from the jump-off, more than halfway to Hammelburg, so obviously Baum was making good progress.

Today, the B26 bypasses Langenprozelten, this picture having been taken just where the old road entered the village, and right below the new highway exit viaduct.

Further into the village, Tech/4 Blau pictured a reconnaissance Jeep of the 49th Cavalry Squadron which supported the 14th Armored on April 4. Baum's task force also included a platoon of three such recon Jeeps, led by 2nd Lieutenant Norman Hoffner and mounted, like this one, with .30-calibre Browning machine guns. (USNA)

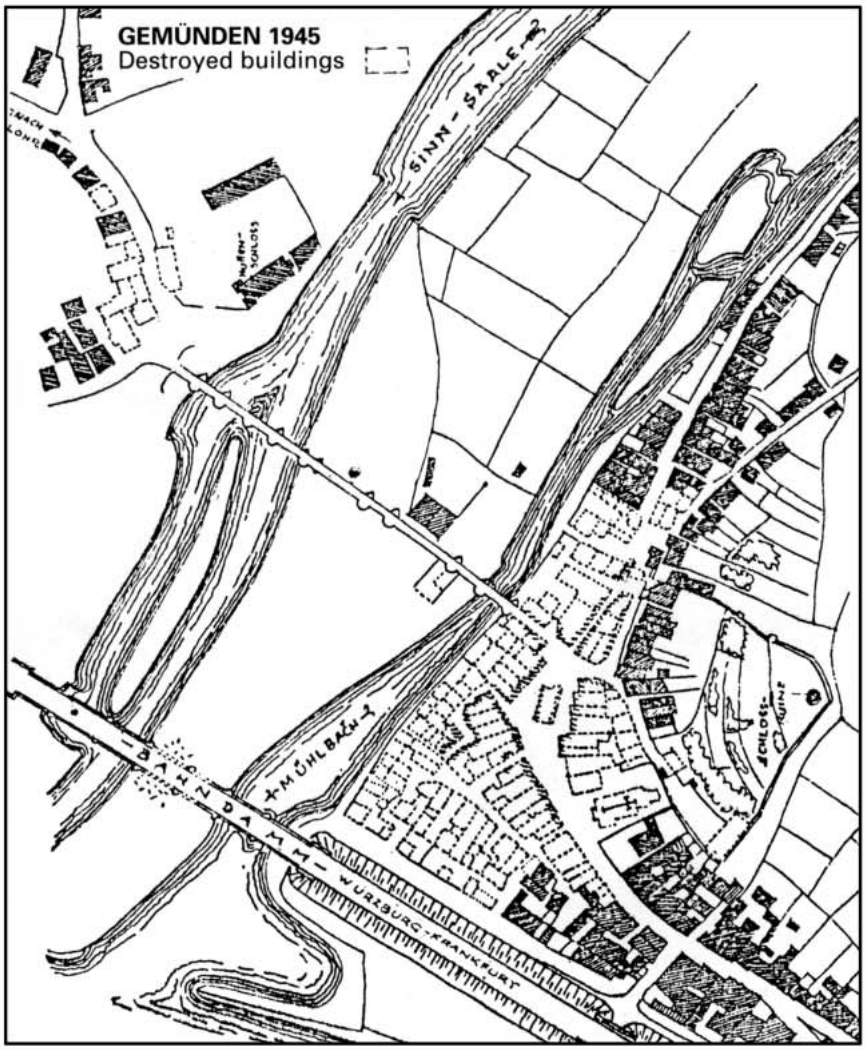
Gemünden was of vital importance to Baum's mission. Here, a small river, the Sinn, joins another small river, the Fränkische Saale, to jointly flow into the Main from the north. A single seven-span stone bridge crossed this tributary. Baum needed this bridge in order to continue on the most-direct road to his destination. Once across the Saale, he could pick up the B27 which would lead directly to Hammelburg. Stopping his column on the outskirts, and ordering strict radio silence, Baum sent Hoffner's recon platoon to sound out the bridge. The time was 0630.

Defending Gemünden were two platoons of the Genesungs-Kompanie (convalescent company) of Pionier-Ersatz- und Ausbildungs-Bataillon 46. The day before, the Kampfkommandant of Würzburg, Generalmajor Karl Bornemann, had ordered the company to prepare the bridges between Gemünden and Miltenberg for demolition. One of the platoons assigned to Gemünden was led by Oberfeldwebel Eugen Zöller. They had found the bridges there already wired, the road bridge with artillery shells, aircraft bombs and T-mines, and the railway bridge with two torpedoes. Zöller's men were mostly young naval volunteers, 16-17 years old, who had just been retrained at Regensburg to fight as engineers. They had only a few carbines, but almost every one of them was armed with a Panzerfaust, of which they had plenty. Although young and inexperienced, they were eager to fight. Also, Zöller and the other NCO leaders were hardened veterans who had all fought on the Eastern Front and been wounded there, most of them several times. (Some accounts say the Germans at Gemünden also had an anti-tank gun, set up in the old castle ruins overlooking the bridge from across the river, but this is not so. Nor did they have machine guns.)

Contrary to what has been said in many accounts, the Gemünden defenders had not received prior warnings of the Americans coming, either from the other towns or from the 7. Armee. The day before, a heavy Allied fighter-bomber raid had hit the post office, knocking out all military and civilian telephone lines. As a result, Gemünden was the only town along the route left unnotified. This explains why trains were still leaving the town and why Baum's men saw German officers carrying briefcases on their way to

It was at Gemünden, 14 miles from Hammelburg, that Baum suffered a setback which probably decided the fate of his foray. In order to continue to Hammelburg, he needed the bridge across the Fränkische Saale in the town. He sent a tank and infantry platoon down the Frankfurter Strasse (towards the camera) to get it.

Responsible for defending the Gemünden bridge was 25-year-old Oberfeldwebel Eugen Zöller. A veteran of four years on the Russian front as a combat engineer with the 46. Infanterie-Division, and convalescing from his ninth combat wound, he was given command of a platoon of teenager Kriegsmarine cadets freshly retrained as engineers, and sent to Gemünden. (courtesy W. Leipold)
Right: **Within the town there were two bridges, a road and a railway bridge, both crossing the Fränkische Saale, a confluence of the Saale and Sinn rivers flowing into the Main from the north. The Germans had prepared both bridges for demolition, the railway bridge with two torpedoes, the road bridge with shells, bombs and T-mines. In the event, Baum attacked only the road bridge.**



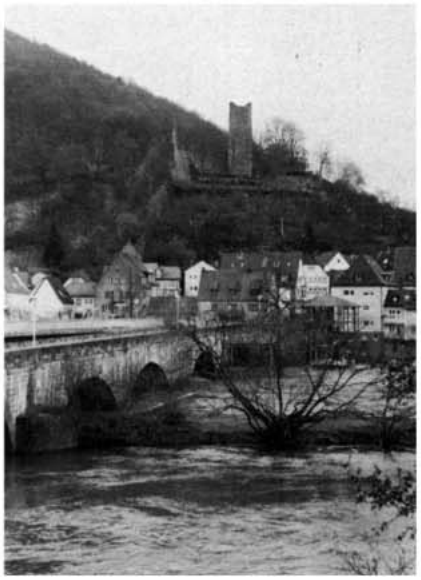
Baum's lead tank, commanded by 2nd Lieutenant Ray Keil, was knocked out by a Panzerfaust just short of the bridge; shortly after, the Germans blew the middle span, blowing up two of the GIs that were assaulting across. Ten days later, when the 14th Armored assaulted the town and Tech/5 Joseph Bowen took this picture, Keil's disabled Sherman was still there. (USNA)

work, totally unaware that the Americans had arrived. Zöller's men were only alerted by the sounds of Baum's force shooting up the trains. Woken from their sleep, many came running to the bridge positions half-dressed or without helmet.

Hoffner's three recce Jeeps entered the town through the narrow Frankfurter Strasse, which looked menacingly deserted. Soon, the street widened and Hoffner saw the bridge. Unburied land mines lay at the approach. Hoffner threw two smoke grenades and, together with the corporal from each Jeep, dismounted to remove the mines, tossing them into a nearby orchard. The Germans started firing through the smoke. Remounting his Jeep, Hoffner raced back to Baum to report that the bridge was intact, though defended.

Baum immediately decided he would have to force the bridge. He ordered Hoffner to return and test the defences with his Jeep-mounted machine guns. To get the bridge, he put Lieutenant Nutto's Shermans in the lead and ordered 1st Platoon of A Company, led by 1st Lieutenant Elmer Sutton, to go with them. He radioed the relay plane asking for immediate air support.

As the lead Sherman neared the bridge, Oberfeldwebel Zöller shouted to one of his men to blow the span. The young sapper ran onto the bridge and lit the fuse. Meanwhile, Panzerfausts were fired at the oncoming Sherman from several sides. The tank staggered and stopped in the middle of the road, five yards in front of the bridge. (The hit had been scored by an Oberstabsfeldwebel.) The stunned tank platoon leader, 2nd Lieutenant Raymond W. Keil, helped his badly burned crew out, but Lieutenant Nutto, in the second tank, realised the disabled tank blocked the way for the others behind it. Dismounting, he went forward and, grabbing the lead tank's sergeant commander, told him to move the tank. But the man was panic-stricken. 'I'm quittin', I'm quittin', he shouted and broke to the rear. Meanwhile, Sutton's infantry was proceeding alone. Sutton was kneeling at one of the bridge abutments, waving his men on. The din of battle was overwhelming.



Exactly 50 years after the bridge was blown, *After the Battle* reader Richard Whitaker of Los Gatos, California, pictured the Gemünden bridge on March 26, 1995, when he drove the route of TF Baum. (Prior to his trip, Richard had contacted Abe Baum, and at a later meeting he was able to discuss with him the wartime photographs we planned to include.)

Keil's tank blocked the way for the other tanks. With Panzerfausts being fired from every side, two more Shermans were knocked out (one can be seen behind Keil's tank). Baum himself, and his tank company commander, Lieutenant Bill Nutto, were wounded when a Panzerfaust hit the cobblestones near where they were standing. Although taken ten days later, Tech/5 Bowen's picture is a perfect illustration of the action of March 27. (USNA)

Baum ran up to confer with Nutto. They were standing next to a Sherman when another Panzerfaust was fired. Both men heard its *whoomp*. The projectile hit the street to their front, throwing up tar and steel splinters. Nutto went down, hit in his arms, chest, neck, and badly in the legs. Baum was hit in the knee and right hand, touching the bone in both places. Pfc Irving Solotoff, from Hoffner's platoon (and Baum's German interpreter), ran up to help Baum steady himself. Baum ordered the badly-bleeding Nutto back to the half-tracks. Radio operator Sidles tended Baum's knee wound. It hurt, but he could still bend it.

Meanwhile, the fight raged on. The Germans were on both sides of the river. From the houses along the Frankfurter Strasse, they fired their Panzerfausts and rifles at the Americans. Two more Shermans were lost to German bazookas. Meanwhile, Sutton and a few of his men had made it across the bridge. Two GIs were just running across when the span went up in a spume of stone and concrete. The two men vanished in the explosion.

The matter was decided: there was no sense in continuing the fight here. Baum ordered his troops to withdraw. (Sutton and the men on the far bank were forced to surrender. In all, the Germans took 37 Americans prisoner. In addition, they also claim to have captured a few half-tracks and a Jeep. Three Germans had been killed.)

A captured German had told Baum that Gemünden was a marshalling area for two German divisions and that one had just unloaded in Gemünden. Having seen all the troop trains on the way in and in view of the tough resistance in town, Baum believed him. He decided it was best to seek another route and find a bridge elsewhere. (He appears never to have considered attacking the Gemünden railway bridge, so Zöller was able to save it from being blown.)

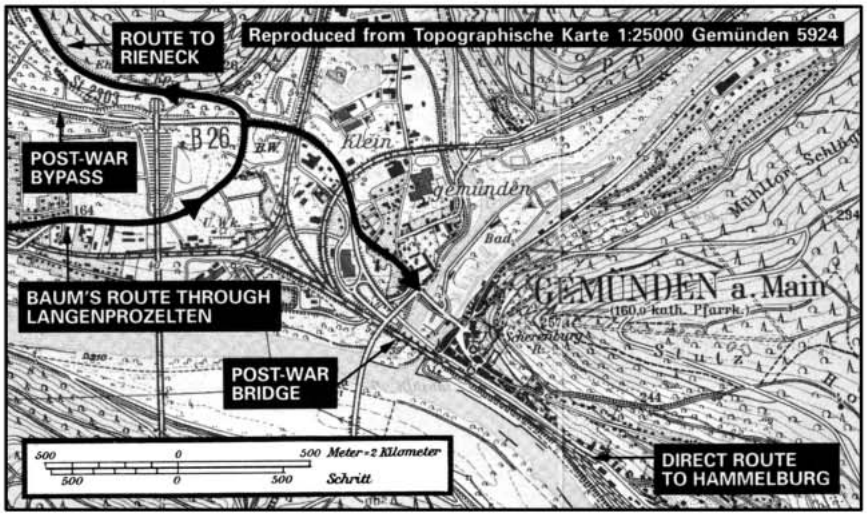
A new underpass now leads pedestrians into Frankfurter Strasse. A new bridge, visible on the right, now carries the road.

Above: **The view from Frankfurter Strasse towards the bridge. Zöller's boy soldiers fought with reckless courage. Two were killed standing in the middle of the street to aim their Panzerfausts. One Sherman, aswarm with Germans, had to swing its turret around to swipe them off. After the Americans had left, Zöller's men found a map in Keil's tank which had the route to Hammelburg marked on it. This was the Germans' first indication of the enemy column's destination. (USNA)** *Right:* **Today, Frankfurter Strasse is much wider than in 1945, the houses destroyed by the fighting or by the air raids on the town having been rebuilt further back.** *Below left:* **Some of Baum's infantry, about 30 men of 1st Platoon of A Company led by Lieutenant Elmer Sutton, had made it across the bridge and into the first houses of Gemünden proper. Cut off when the bridge went up, they were soon forced to surrender. This picture shows GIs of the 14th Armored clearing the same houses ten days later. (USNA)** *Below right:* **The corner house of the street leading from the bridge into Marktplatz has gone, but the houses along Plattnergasse remain unchanged.**

With the Main to his south, Baum had no option but to go north and follow the west bank of the Sinn hoping to catch an intact bridge. Once across, they would hit the Saale, the north bank of which would lead to Hammelburg.

The turn-off to the north lay just outside the town. Turning the column around was an intricate manoeuvre. The vehicles had first to back up out of Frankfurter Strasse before they could safely turn around. Fortunately, some of the rear vehicles had not yet reached the turn-off, and could simply wait for the others to double back and turn onto the new route before following themselves.

About 0830, as the task force climbed up the hill out of the Main valley, leaving Gemünden behind and passing through Schaippach, Baum radioed another message back to battalion: 'Four mediums lost. Two officers and 18 men wounded or killed. Proceeding.' (This message, which reached Division HQ at 1010, was the first indication that the column had swung north.)


ROUTE TO RIENECK
Reproduced from Topographische Karte 1:25000 Gemünden 5924
POST-WAR BYPASS
BAUM'S ROUTE THROUGH LANGENPROZELTEN
POST-WAR BRIDGE
DIRECT ROUTE TO HAMMELBURG
GEMÜNDEN a. Main
500 0 500 Meter = 2 Kilometer
500 0 500 Schritt

Forced to back out of Gemünden, Baum had no option but to turn north, hoping to find a bridge somewhere else. With the construction of the Langenprozelten bypass, the turn-off junction has completely changed its appearance. In the trees along the uphill road is the Gemünden German War Cemetery. *Top:* **The map shows the present-day situation.**

Four miles on, at Rieneck, the column halted for a time at a roadfork while one of the light tanks reconnoitred the left-hand, uphill road to see whether it was better than the one leading around the base of the hill. While doing so, the tank lost a track and had to be abandoned. The only roadfork which fits the description is this one, actually in Rieneck itself.

Four miles from Gemünden, at Rieneck, the column came to a fork in the road. Baum ordered Yoerk's *City of New York* to recce the left-hand, uphill road. Yoerk found it to be a dead end, but, when he reversed his tank, it threw a track. The crew abandoned the tank, destroying its gun with a thermite grenade, then boarded one of the half-tracks.

While they were away, the column waited at Rieneck. Baum used the halt to check on the wounded. The two medics, Tech/5 David Zeno and Pfc Andrew Demchak of the 37th, told him that four of the wounded were so bad they would die if left in a jolting half-track. Baum ordered them put by the side of the road, to be left behind hoping that the Germans would find and take care of them.

Still at Rieneck, the force was temporarily joined by a lone American Jeep. This carried a three-man psychological warfare team from Seventh Army led by Tech/3 Ernst Langendorf. They had set out early that morning from Griesheim near Darmstadt but had no idea how deep into enemy territory they were. At Gemünden, they had picked up American tank tracks and followed them until they caught up with Baum's column. While with them, Langendorf, using his loudspeaker, talked a group of about 100 German soldiers, who were hiding in the woods, into surrender. However, on learning that this was a Third Army force, Langendorf took off again in search of his own outfit.

At 1100, the air strike requested by Baum hit Gemünden, P-47s of XIX Tactical Air Command wreaking havoc and destruction in the town.

The column started to move again, going around the base of the hill, with the light tanks leading. Now that he had left his pre-planned route, Baum's main worry was that he would run off his map before he found a bridge over the Sinn. His map only went as far north as Obersinn, 11 miles further on. Also, should he be forced to take minor roads, his map would perhaps not be detailed enough. He realised he would have to make use of local people to guide him.

However, the story of the guides as given in American accounts is not borne out by local knowledge. In the American version, the column first ran into a German paratrooper on a motorcycle. From him, Baum learned that there was a bridge across the Sinn at Burgsinn. Forced to mount the lead tank, this paratrooper is then said to have no less than three times on the road to Burgsinn talked a group of German soldiers into surrendering, the last one purportedly manning two anti-tank guns. A little further on, the column is then said to have captured a motorcycle combination (another account says a Volkswagen staff car) with three occupants, including a general named Oriel Lotz, who was unceremoniously told to mount the bonnet of a half-track.

Fähnrich Karl Kessler who guided Baum from Burgsinn to Gräfendorf. (W. Leipold)

The facts, however, are slightly different. The soldier picked up first was 21-year-old Karl Kessler form Burgsinn. He was not a paratrooper but an engineer NCO, and not riding a motorbike but a bicycle. Home on convalescent leave from an arm wound sustained on the Eastern Front, he had been asked by the mayor to meet the Americans to tell them the village was undefended. Cycling out, he decided the risk was too great and had already turned back, when Baum's column caught up with him. He did indeed tell Baum about the bridge at Burgsinn, but knows nothing of talking Germans soldiers into giving up.

As for General Oriel Lotz, there never was a German general of that name. Perhaps the Americans mistook his uniform and he was just a lower-ranking officer or maybe even the proverbial station master, but whoever it was, he was not a general. Certainly, Karl Kessler did not see a German general captured. Outside Burgsinn, the column did pick up another German who was however not bundled off to a half-track but told to sit next to Kessler on the lead tank.

Left: **The original bridge across the Sinn at Burgsinn used by Baum still stands. Today, a new bridge crosses the river one mile further to the north, and the old bridge now only leads to the railway station, the level crossing having been closed off. According to the weight-capacity sign, it would still carry a Sherman today.** *Right:* **At this spot, just before Gräfendorf, Baum's column liberated some 700 Russian slave workers. The 200-odd Germans captured en route were left with them.**

The bridge at Burgsinn was small, but did not buckle under the weight of the tanks. Once across the Sinn, the force followed the winding road across the thickly-wooded hill which separates the Sinn and Saale valleys (An unpaved road, it appeared to the Americans they were going 'cross-country' along 'a mountain trail', but it was in fact the main road connecting Burgsinn with Gräfendorf.) After about six miles, the column began the very steep descent down to Gräfendorf.

Just before the village, they ran into a large group of about 700 Russian PoW slave workers accompanied by German guards. The guards surrendered, and the Russians surrounded the column, shouting wildly and kissing the Americans. Some of them armed themselves and took to the woods in a western direction. (PoW work squads in this area mostly originated from Stalag XIII-C, the other PoW camp at Hammelburg, and this one most probably came from there as well. Had Baum realised this, he could well have found a good guide from among the Russians.)

Baum turned the 200 German prisoners his force had collected along the way over to the Russians and, leaving the Russians in a happy confusion, moved on to Gräfendorf. At the entrance of the village, Kessler and his companion were told to walk in front of the column to act as a shield. However, white sheets were hanging from the houses and the column rolled in unopposed. At Gräfendorf, the Schondra creek flowing into the Saale from the north could have been a further obstacle but, luckily for Baum, the bridge was intact. From Gräfendorf, Baum sent back another situation report which reached division HQ at 1255. Its location showed that the column was still working toward the objective. Hammelburg was now only seven miles away.

By now, Kessler's arm wound was hurting badly, and he asked Baum to be relieved of his guide duty. Pleased to have come thus far, Baum let him go. To replace him, the Americans picked Anton Försch (not Birsch, as in one American account), an elderly man who stood watching the column from his cottage garden, and only reluctantly let himself be put in Baum's Jeep.

From Gräfendorf, Baum followed the north bank of the Saale, where the railway to Hammelburg runs parallel to the road. It was here, in the open valley, that the column was spotted by a Fieseler Storch light plane, one of those sent out by von Obstfelder to find them. Realising the danger, the whole column instantly opened up on the plane with every weapon — machine guns, BARs, carbines, M1s — trying to shoot it down. Even the wounded were firing. However, the plane was weaving and keeping its distance. It passed the column, circled, came in again from the rear, and then, rocking its wings, flew away unhit. Now, Baum realised, the Germans knew where they were. It was 1400.

Von Obstfelder's spotter planes had in fact kept Baum's column under surveillance throughout the morning. They had first located him north of Gemünden, lost him because of the heavy forestation, again spotted him east of Burgsinn, lost him a second time, and now found him east of Gräfendorf. In addition to the strength and location of the enemy column, Obstfelder now also knew its destination: in the Sherman knocked out at the Gemünden bridge, the Germans had found a map on which the route to Hammelburg had been marked and this had immediately been reported to higher headquarters; telephone reports from towns passed through by the Americans had confirmed that their main concern had been to find a route to Hammelburg. Obviously, the enemy was heading for that town.

At Gräfendorf, Baum crossed another tributary of the Saale, the Schondra. Here, he released Karl Kessler, picking up Anton Försch to replace him as guide. In order to get to Hammelburg, he still needed to cross the Saale itself. As he followed the river's north bank through a wide open valley, his column was spotted by a German recce plane — the Germans now definitely knew his strength and location. *Above:* **Three miles from Gräfendorf, Baum finally crossed the Saale at Michelau.**

Left: **Two miles further on, at Weickersgrüben, Anton Försch mistakenly led the column up the left fork, towards the Grüner Baum inn** *(right).* **Too frightened to continue, he pleaded with the innkeeper, Karl Stürzenberger, to take his place.**

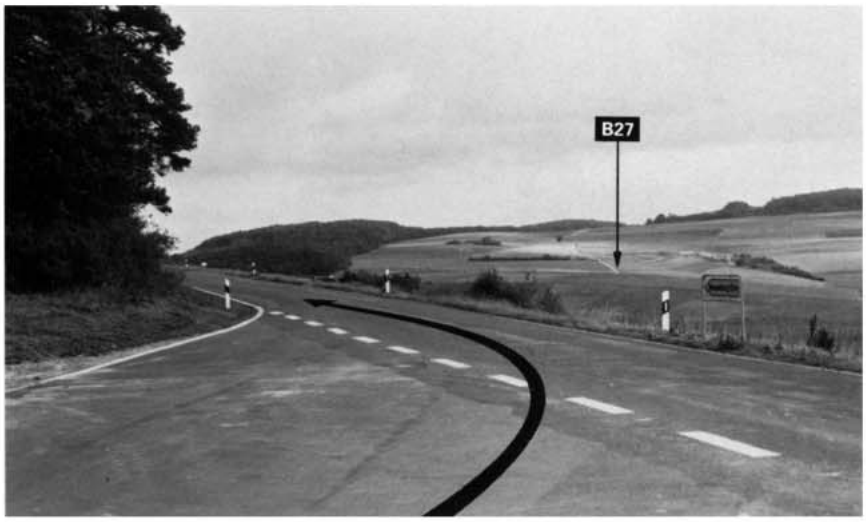
A few miles beyond the place where the column had been spotted, the road passed under the railway and crossed the Saale by a very narrow bridge into the village of Michelau, continuing along the south bank until it began to climb out of the valley again at Weickersgrüben. By now, old Anton Försch was of little use as a guide. He was obviously scared stiff, and seemed lost. On entering Weickersgrüben, he had directed the column up a dead-end street. Next to where this road turned into a trail stood an inn, the Grüner Baum. Försch knew the landlord, Karl Stürzenberger (wrongly named Bernhard Gerstenberger in one American account), and pleaded with him to take his place. Through interpreter Solotoff, Stürzenberger explained to Baum that his wife was about to give birth, but he could see that the grim-faced Americans were unsympathetic, and he boarded Baum's Jeep.

Stürzenberger was with the column for only a short time. In less than a mile, the steep road out of his village joins another road which runs along the crest of the Tannenberg hill, which in turn leads in half a mile to a junction with the B27, the main road which Baum had originally hoped to catch from Gemünden. At the first junction, Stürzenberger pointed the way to the B27 and the Hammelburg camp. He told Baum the camp was about two miles south of Hammelburg itself (this was in fact the first indication Baum had of where the camp was in relation to the town). Stürzenberger tried to explain that the most direct way to it was not via the main road and Hammelburg, but that it was easier to carry on due east, across the B27 and along the track which they could see skirting south of the forest in front of them.

Baum let Stürzenberger go. However, much too pleased to have refound the main road, he disregarded the German's advice and turned left at the junction, onto the B27, descending through the forest to emerge in the open valley at Obereschenbach. (Had he followed Stürzenberger's directions, he would not have run into German armour as he was about to do.) Here, the column received tank fire from up ahead. It stopped to return the fire, then proceeded cautiously to the next village, Untereschenbach. They were now just one and a half mile from Hammelburg. Tension was growing. During the halt at Weickersgrüben, Baum had heard heavy vehicles moving. Clearly, the Germans were near.

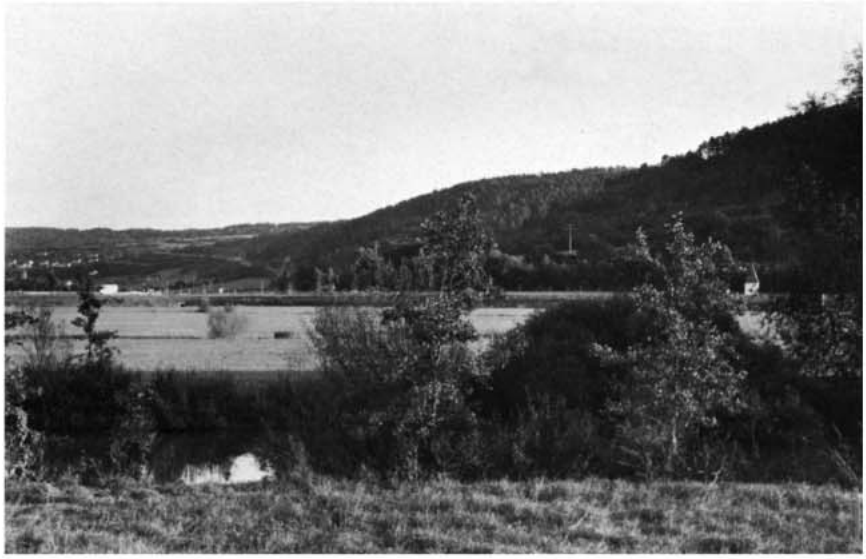
The situation had indeed developed on the German side. At 1000 (0900 German time), the Panzerjäger-Abteilung from Meiningen sent by Wehrkreis XIII arrived by train at Hammelburg station. It had been moved by rail because that was faster and to conserve fuel. Commanded by Hauptmann Heinrich Köhl (not Richard Köhl as in all previous accounts), the unit mustered seven 75mm Jagdpanzer 38(t) Hetzer tank destroyers (not 88mm Ferdinands as stated incorrectly in most American accounts). Expecting the enemy to arrive from the direction of Diebach, i.e. along the north bank of the Saale, Köhl first directed his SPs to a position just west of Hammelburg. Changing his mind, he pulled them back, repositioning them around the railway station and the Hammelburg tile factory, still north of the Saale but now facing south. (This was the engine noise Baum had heard.) By 1500, Köhl was in position and ready.

Meanwhile, warned of the American approach, the mayor of Hammelburg, Karl Clement, had at 1000 (German time) ordered the evacuation of the town, and everyone had hastily fled to the north and east. Only the local Volkssturm unit under Josef Merkle remained as a token defence force.



Stürzenberger led the Americans to the crest of the hill, pointing out the B27 — the main road which Baum had originally wanted to take from Gemünden (coming up from the right on the slope in the distance). He also pointed out to Baum that the shortest route to the PoW camp was not via the B27 but by the track running straight across the crest in the distance (to the right of the wood). Baum, however, chose to disregard Stürzenberger's advice and turned onto the B26, which was not surprising as commanders of armoured columns always prefer surfaced roads. However, as a result, he was soon to become engaged in a costly tank battle.

In 1985, Stürzenberger demonstrated how he pointed the way to Hammelburg. After Baum released them, both Karl Kessler and Karl Stürzenberger had to hide up for a few days as SS henchmen were scouring the villages looking for people who had helped the Americans along the way. (L. Döll)



Now at last nearing Hammelburg, Baum ran into shell-fire from seven German Hetzer tank destroyers of Panzerjäger-Abteilung Köhl which had just been unloaded at Hammelburg station. The picture is taken from the Hetzers' position looking towards the B27 which runs right below the high Saaleck hill. As Baum's column came in from the right, the Hetzers opened fire across the open ground.

By now, Baum had reached Untereschenbach. At the exit of the village, where the B27 enters the Saale valley, the road curves sharply to the right to run parallel with the river. On its right rises the vertical face of the high Saaleck hill; on its left is the flat, open expanse of the Saale valley with Hammelburg town beyond. As Baum's column rounded this curve, it exposed itself to Köhl's tank destroyers in their position near the railway station across the river. The Hetzers opened fire. The American tanks were driving at top speed and got past unhurt, firing back with everything they had, but the vehicles behind were an easy target for the Hetzers. On the short stretch of road between the Untereschenbach curve and the turn-off to the PoW camp, six vehicles — three Jeeps and three half-tracks — were hit in quick succession. One of the half-tracks hit was that of Captain Lange, the infantry company commander, who was seriously wounded. (He later died of his wounds.)

While running the gauntlet of the German fire, Baum oriented himself. He now knew that, in order to get to the PoW camp, he did not need to enter Hammelburg itself. Just before the Saale bridge into the town, a road branched off to the right, away from the town. This was the road he had to take. However, the camp was on a hill plateau, and the road to it a steep one. Baum could see it clinging like a shelve to the side of the hill, completely exposed until it began to curve near the top.

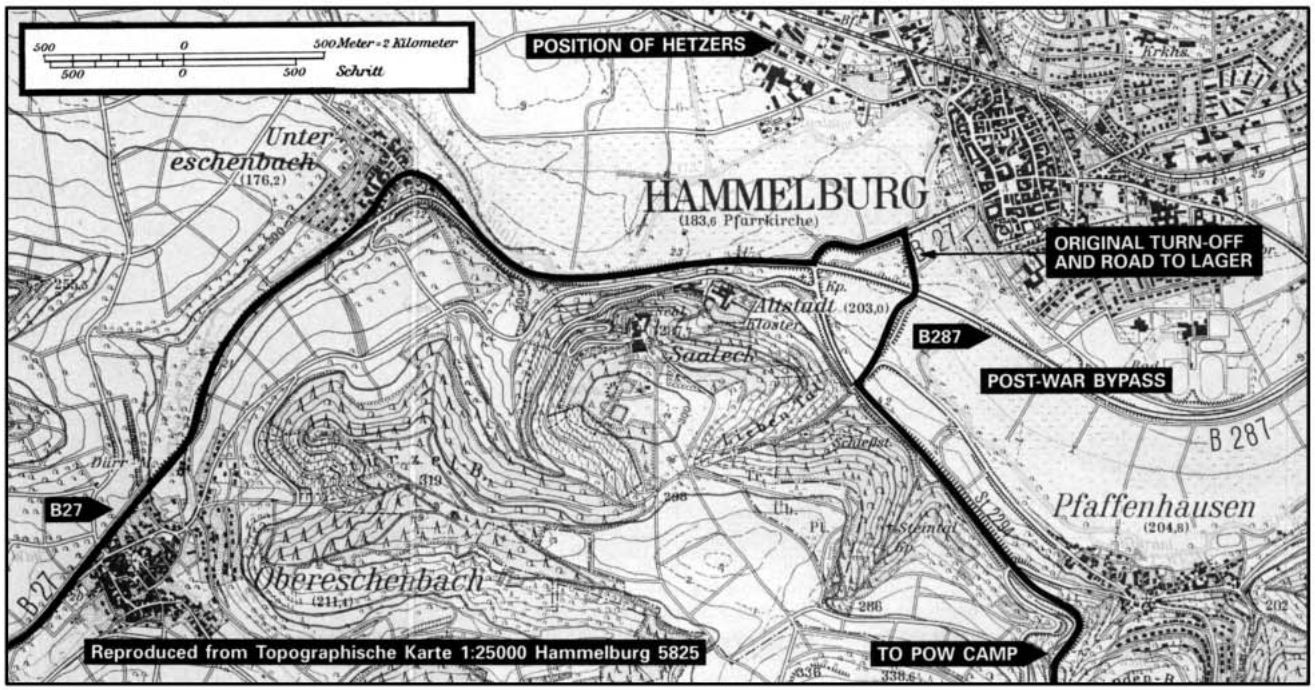
As the column started to labour up the incline, Baum ordered Sergeant Graham to deploy two of his 105mm assault guns at an exposed knoll from where they could answer the enemy fire. The gun commanded by Pfc Herbert E. Reynolds first dropped smoke shells to shield the American column. Next, spotting six trucks heading for the enemy position, Reynolds hit four of them with HE shells and they exploded in flame. The Americans thought they carried ammunition, but in fact they carried the Hetzers' fuel supply. Meanwhile, the gun commanded by Tech/4 Alfonso Casanova engaged the German SPs themselves, firing off 30 rounds in a few minutes. Two of the Hetzers were knocked out (the Americans thought they had hit three).

Standing in his Jeep next to the assault guns, Baum saw the men in undamaged half-tracks still on the lower slope dismount from their vehicles to look for cover. Angrily, he shouted at the drivers to get moving again, to drive off the road and around the disabled vehicles.

As the force struggled uphill, the tanks crawling in the lead slowed down the half-tracks stretched out behind them. Some accounts suggest that the column's main losses to the SPs occurred during this slow climb, but this is not so. The climb, though exposed, created distance and soon brought the American vehicles out of accurate range of the Hetzers. Most vehicles were hit while still on the B27. However, American losses in the battle with the Hetzers are somewhat unclear. Certainly knocked out were five half-tracks (including the one loaded with spare fuel, and the one carrying 105mm ammunition) and three Jeeps (the medical vehicle and two of the recon Jeeps). One Sherman was hit on the lower slope, the gunner being killed and the other crew members wounded. However, Sergeant Yoerk and two of his crew from the abandoned *City of New York*, who had dismounted from their half-track and were going uphill on foot, came upon the damaged tank and, assisted by two other tankers and a maintenance sergeant, managed to get it moving again, driving it up the crest. One account says two other Shermans were lost during the uphill climb, but this seems unlikely in view of the number of tanks Baum reported available later.

Quickly turning his column right (towards the camera) at the clump of trees in the middle distance, onto the road climbing up to the PoW camp, Baum ordered his three 105mm SP guns to return the German fire. The guns took up position here, at the Liebental draw on the lower slope. Hammelburg town is in the distance.

As the rest of the task force negotiated the steep road leading to the PoW camp, it put distance between it and the Hetzers down below in the town. Still, Baum lost five half-tracks and three Jeeps in the tank vs tank fight.



This present-day map shows the alterations in the road layout south of the town on Baum's route to the camp. The town bypass did not exist in 1945.

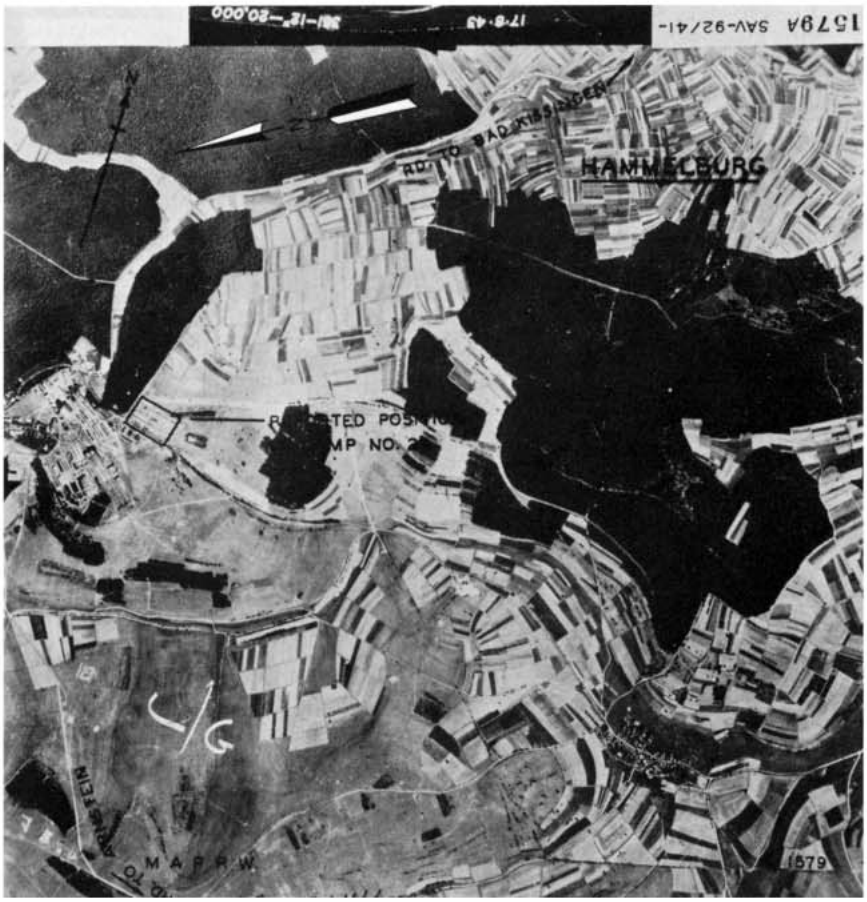
As the tank battle was in full swing, another threat occurred at the rear of the column. A lone German Ju-88 bomber arrived overhead and dropped five bombs. They came down at Obereschenbach, damaging a few houses but not hitting the column. The crew of the one American vehicle still in the village, a tank bringing up the tail, took shelter in a cellar, then drove on. (This lone plane was in fact spotted by the PoWs in the camp two miles away: they could not see its target, but it was the first indication they had that something unusual was up.)

Under the deadly fire from the American guns, with the enemy force disappearing over the hill, and his petrol trucks destroyed, Hauptmann Köhl broke off the fight. His remaining five Hetzers were too low on fuel to continue the battle. At 1700 (German time), he moved his guns to Fuchsstadt, just east of Hammelburg, there to await new fuel.

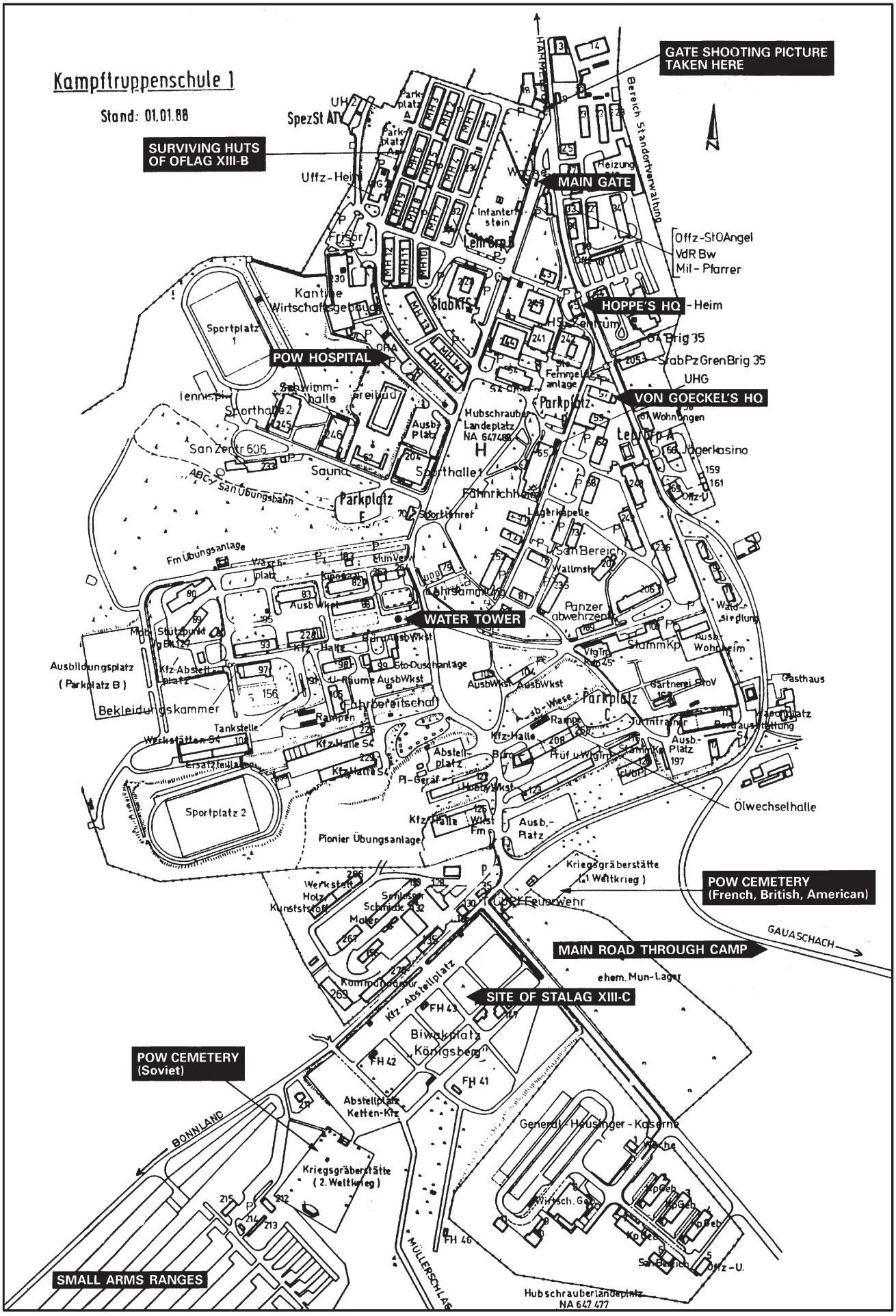
Meanwhile, Baum had kept pushing his force over the ridge onto the high ground. Near the top, there was room for the vehicles to deploy. As they reached the crest, the Americans saw their objective, the PoW camp they had come to liberate, for the first time.

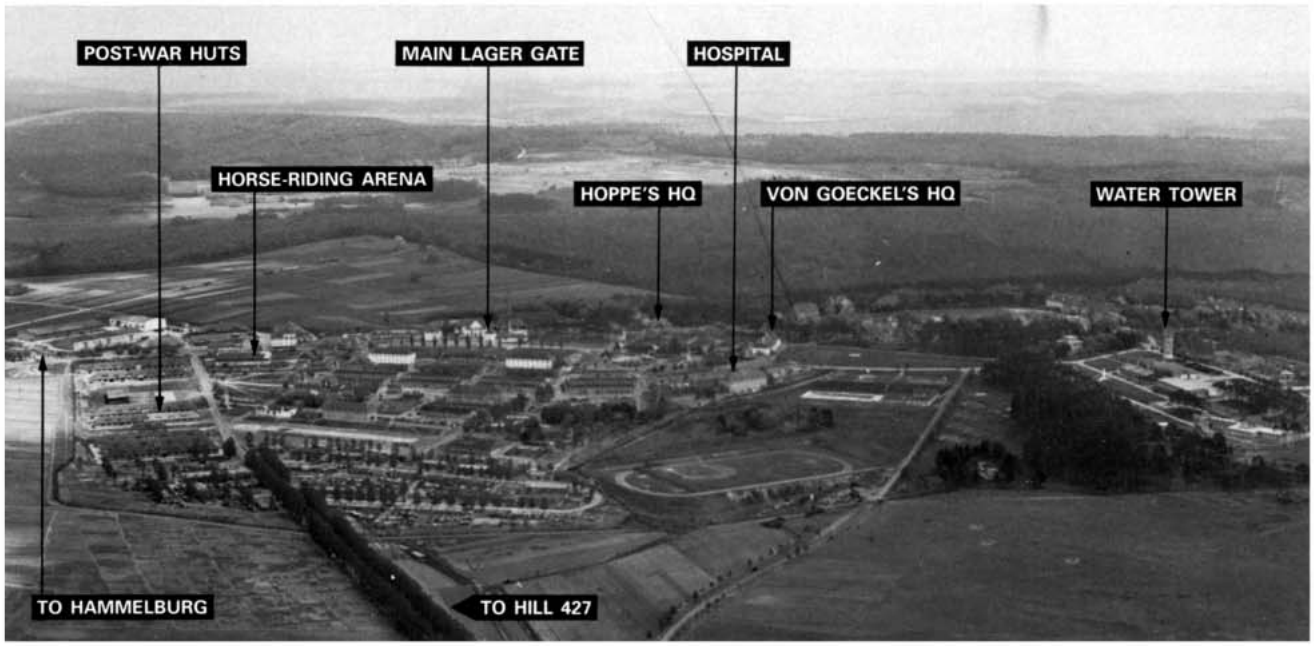
Oflag XIII-B was part of a much larger military complex known as Hammelburg Lager. Set in a saucer-like hollow on a plateau, this had been built in 1895 and after by the Prussian Imperial Army as an army training centre. Already during World War I, a part of the Lager had been set aside as PoW camp. From 1921 to 1935, it served civilian purposes, part of it being used as a Catholic youth convalescent home till 1931. In 1935, Hitler secretly reverted the Lager back to military use, making it a training centre for panzer units. In 1937-38, the nearby villages of Hundsfeld and Bonnland to the south were evacuated and incorporated into the training area. The empty villages were used for house-to-house fight training and the surrounding countryside became an infantry anti-tank range.

In the Second World War, the Germans again used parts of the Lager for PoWs while continuing to use the rest as military training facility. There were in fact two separate PoW camps within the Lager. At the south-eastern end, along the Hundsfeld road, lay Stalag (Stammlager) XIII-C, a vast camp housing some 30,000 enlisted men, mainly Russian, but also French, British, Canadian, Australian and American. At the northern end, on the Hammelburg side of the Lager, lay Oflag (Offizierslager) XIII-B, used to house captured officers. This was the camp Baum was to liberate.



There were in fact two PoW camps at Hammelburg, Oflag XIII-B for officers (Baum's target) and Stalag XIII-C for enlisted men. American intelligence about the Hammelburg camps was sketchy, as exemplified by the errors on this annotated aerial. The 'reported position of camp No. 29' (the Allies assigned their own numbers to PoW camps) is the Stalag (today, the site is just an open field next to the training area's present-day small-arms range), but the orientation of the print is incorrect — we have indicated the correct position of north — and the 'road to Bad Kissingen' is in fact the road to Arnstein, southwards instead of east. Lower right is Hundsfeld, one of the Hammelburg training villages. (courtesy Colonel Roy M. Stanley II)


Kampftruppenschule 1
Stand: 01.01.88
GATE SHOOTING PICTURE TAKEN HERE
SURVIVING HUTS OF OFLAG XIII-B
MAIN GATE
HOPPE'S HQ
POW HOSPITAL
VON GOECKEL'S HQ
WATER TOWER
POW CEMETERY (French, British, American)
MAIN ROAD THROUGH CAMP
SITE OF STALAG XIII-C
POW CEMETERY (Soviet)
SMALL ARMS RANGES
GAUASCHACH
BONNLAND
Offz-StOAngel
VdR Bw
Mil-Pfarrer
Brig 35
SrabPzGrenBrig 35
UHG
Jägerkasino
Ölwechselhalle
Gasthaus
Sportplatz 1
Sportplatz 2
Sporthalle 1
Sporthalle 2
Sauna
Parkplatz A
Parkplatz B
Parkplatz C
Parkplatz F
Ausbildungsplatz (Parkplatz B)
Bekleidungskammer
Tankstelle
Pionier Übungsanlage
Kriegsgräberstätte (1. Weltkrieg)
Kriegsgräberstätte (2. Weltkrieg)
Feuerwehr
Biwakplatz Königsberg
General-Heusinger-Kaserne
Hubschrauberlandeplatz NA 647 477
Müllerschlag
ehem. Mun-Lager



This aerial was taken in May 1950 when Hammelburg camp was in use as a USAREUR transportation training centre. The French Cross is just off the picture on the left, and the huts which constituted Oflag XIII-B are in the centre. The longer huts in between are post-war additions, built to house German refugees. The tree-lined avenue descending in the foreground leads into the training area. Baum came in from the left and departed down the tree-lined road. (USNA)

Oflag XIII-B consisted of some 40 stone and wooden huts. Cold and drafty, each hut had 40 two-tiered bunks and a single stove. Around the camp's barbed wire perimeter stood 12 guard towers, each armed with searchlights and a machine gun. At the far end rose a water tower.

The first PoWs to arrive in Oflag XIII-B were some 4,000 Serbs, captured in April 1941 and constituting a large part of the Yugoslav officer corps. Most were Royalists, aristocratic and vehemently patriotic, but there were also a few Communists. From 1943 to 1945, a steady trickle of officers from nearly all the Allied nations followed the Serbs, but the latter remained the majority. By 1945, their number was about 3,200. The Serbs' senior officer was Colonel-General Yaromir Brastich.

On January 18, 1945, the first of about 700 American officers captured in the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge arrived at the camp. To make room for the newcomers, the Serbs were moved into another section of the Oflag, separated by a single barbed wire fence. The Americans were mostly from the 106th and 28th Infantry Divisions, with some from the 99th Division and 14th Cavalry Group — all units which had been hit hard in the Ardennes. They were for the most part dispirited men, not proud of their performance in battle, with little morale left. The younger officers had lost respect for the field-grade officers. The ranking US officer, Colonel Charles C. Cavender (who had surrendered his entire 423rd Infantry Regiment in the Schnee Eifel on December 19) was a broken man whose leadership was weak and vacillating. As a consequence, camp discipline was very low.

The Kriegies (from the German word for PoW: *Kriegsgefangener*) subsisted on an average ration of one loaf for eight men in the morning and a watery turnip soup for lunch and dinner. Red Cross parcels arrived infrequently to bolster up the diet. The winter of 1944/45 was very severe. The men suffered from hunger, cold and disease. Many were ill with dysentery and typhus. Long roll calls added to the misery, and boredom and monotony were unendurable. Each week, men died from sickness or starvation. On two occasions, Americans had been shot by a guard, 1st Lieutenant George H. Vaream during an air raid alert on the night of January 21/22, and 1st Lieutenant Charles L. Weeks while returning from the latrine on the evening of March 21 (both were 106th Division men).

In the last week of February, a group of some 60 American officers (captured in the Alsace in January) arrived in the camp. Then, in early March, about 800 Americans arrived from Poland. They had come from Oflag 64 at Szubin, a camp containing some 1,600 American PoWs. Their senior officer was Colonel Paul R. Goode (CO of the 175th Infantry, 29th Division, captured near St Lô on June 13, 1944). His 2 i/c was Lieutenant Colonel John Waters, Patton's son-in-law. On January 21, with the Red Army coming near, the Germans had evacuated the camp, marching out 1,400 of the Americans westwards (200 sick and wounded were left behind). In freezing cold and heavy snow, they had marched over 300 miles in 45 days to Parchim in North Germany. From there, 400 of them, including Goode and Waters, had been put in boxcars for the final leg to Hammelburg. The next 400 had been sent to another camp east of Berlin. The 400 at the end of the column had to march all the way to Hammelburg. Of the remaining 200, some had been killed, others wounded and sent to hospitals, and the rest had escaped (among them the three that had reached Moscow and given word about Waters).

The American senior officer in Oflag XIII-B was Colonel Paul 'Pop' Goode. John Waters, Patton's son-in-law, was his executive officer. Arriving from Poland with 800 others in early March, they had found the 700 Americans already there demoralised and weakly led, and had immediately taken over command, restoring army discipline and order. Pictured at Hammelburg with members of their staff (from left): Waters, Goode, an unidentified YMCA aide, Lieutenant Colonel Schaeffer, Colonel Millet.

Left: **The commander of Oflag XIII-B was Generalmajor Günther von Goeckel. An officer of the old school, he initially kept a tight rein on the American PoWs, but relations improved when Goode became senior US officer. (ISH)** *Right:* **From his HQ next to the Oflag gate, von Goeckel had a clear view of the surrounding area and could observe Baum's every movement.**

The 800 newcomers from Poland had a marked effect on Oflag XIII-B. Under the leadership of Goode, Waters and their staff, they had remained well-organised, maintaining military bearing and discipline. Cohesion and morale was good and, because they had been prisoner so long, they were better at making time pass and keeping fit. Marching in with his men on March 8, Colonel Goode immediately took over command from the dissension-ridden colonels of the 106th Division. Back in Poland, the news of the execution of British PoWs after a mass escape from Sagan camp in March 1944 (see *After the Battle* No. 87) had shaken him, and taken some of the old boldness out of him, but he was still an efficient leader. He and his staff set about shaping up the camp. They inspected every barrack, reviewed every rank, relentlessly imposed the Army way in everything, improved organisation, set up classes. As discipline and morale improved, the German camp authorities and guards became more friendly too.

Commander of Oflag XIII-B was Generalmajor Günther von Goeckel, an elderly man. A regular soldier since 1908, he had been badly wounded in the lung in World War I and consequently always had staff jobs since. He had been appointed Oflag commander in August 1944. Stalag XIII-C was commanded by Oberst Hans Westmann. The commander of the whole Hammelburg training area was Oberst Richard Hoppe (not Hoepple as in some American accounts). The 200 camp guards were not SS, as is sometimes stated, but part of Landesschützen-Bataillon 828, old men armed with captured French and Belgian rifles. Their commander was Major Ernst Götz.

When the American tanks appeared over the crest of the hill, the Germans inside the Lager immediately spotted them. From his HQ building, von Goeckel had a wide view over the entire hill plateau and could clearly see what was happening at the crest where the Americans were deploying. By telephone, he kept Oberst Hoppe informed of what the enemy was doing. Officially, Hoppe was responsible for the defence of the whole Lager complex and training area, and von Goeckel only for the PoW camp. To defend the Oflag, von Goeckel only had his 200 old guards with their obsolete rifles and guard-tower machine guns. To defend the Lager, Hoppe had only his own staff of about 30 men, plus 50-80 men of a Scharfschützen-Lehrgang (sniper training course) of Panzertruppe XII under Oberst Hans-Joachim Mestmacher, who were billeted just north of the Oflag. Down in Bonnland was a detachment of 50-60 officers and NCOs from the Pionierschule Berlin (Oberst Rudolf Bläss), who were undergoing street-fight training under Major Wolfram Diepenbeck (not Diefenbach as in American accounts), but they would only enter the fight later. Hoppe had no armour or artillery, but he had two 3,7cm Bofors flak guns. The Germans occupied a line of foxholes in front of the PoW camp, and some of the buildings along the road.

Left: **Oberst Richard Hoppe commanded the Hammelburg training area. It was he who led the defence of the Lager and later organised the attack that finally eliminated Baum's force on Hill 427. He did not survive the war, committing suicide on April 7, 1945. (ISH)** *Right:* **Hoppe's command post building still stands along the St2294, the Lager thoroughfare.**

Reaching the crest of the hill near the so-called French Cross *(below left)*, **Baum had his first view of the PoW camp and the larger military camp of which it formed a part. (courtesy W. Leipold)**

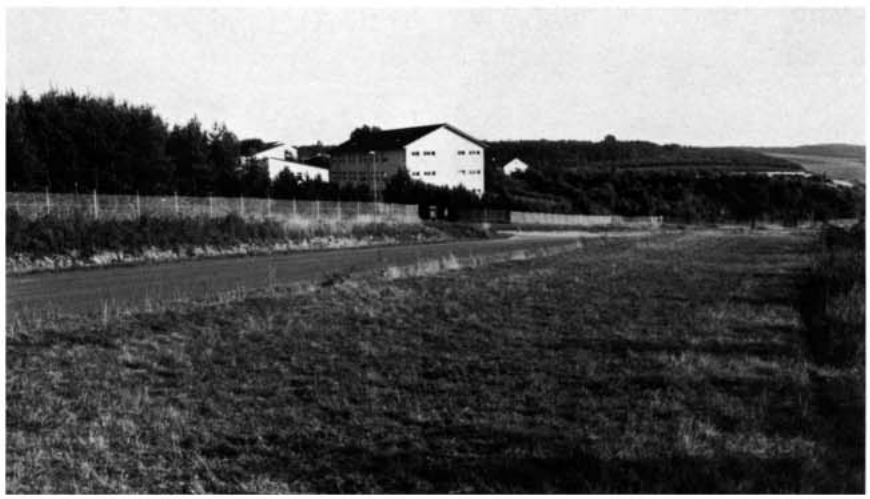
When he reached the crest and saw the camp, Baum felt relief, elation, pride — he had made it to his objective. At the top of the hill, about 500 yards to the left of the road up, stood a large wooden crucifix. Locally known as the French Cross, it had been erected after WWI by former French PoWs. From here, Baum planned to launch his attack on the camp. He directed his tanks to a large grassy plateau in front of the cross, and arranged them, side by side about 100 feet apart, light tanks right, mediums left. He ordered 1st Lieutenant George W. Casteel, A Company's executive officer who had taken over from Captain Lange, to have 2nd and 3rd platoons deploy, and follow behind and between the tanks. The Jeeps, half-tracks and assault guns were placed behind the crest from where the latter could support the attack. Lieutenant Nutto, wounded at Gemünden, came limping forward to resume command of the Shermans.

Shortly before the battle started, von Goeckel had a conference with the American and Serb senior officers, Goode and Brastich, and their staffs, in Goode's office. He told them that the American army was approaching the camp, that he was going to defend the Oflag, that it might well be that he was going to be *their* prisoner in the evening, but that for the moment he was still in command. At the sound of the air raid siren, he told them, all PoWs were to go to the cellars of their huts or into the air raid shelters dug between the huts, and stay there. (Some American accounts state that von Goeckel actually *surrendered* to Goode and Brastich, but this appears not to have been the case, although the rumour certainly circulated among the prisoners at the time.)

At about 1630, Baum ordered his force to attack. Slowly, the tanks ground forward across the open ground, the infantry trotting behind. (Major Stiller had volunteered to lead one of the squads.) At 200 yards, the line was hit by small arms and Panzerfausts. Quite a few infantrymen went down. The two medics, Zeno and Demchak, forced captured Germans to stand in a circle around them as protection while they evacuated the wounded. The tanks and assault guns retaliated. Probably because the tankers mistook the grey Serb uniforms for German ones, most of the American fire was directed at the Serb compound. Machine gun tracers set fire to the roof of a large wooden hut which housed the Serbs' camp theatre. Sergeant Yoerk, still in the tank he had salvaged earlier, took a shot at the water tower and punched a hole in it near the top. In the fields around the Lager stood several straw-stacks. One was hit and the smoke from the burning straw obscured the battlefield.

Inside the camp, there was consternation and excitement. Consigned to their huts, prisoners watched the battle from the windows, ducking for cover only when bullets came near. In the camp hospital, patients were put on the floor for better protection. In the chapel, Father Paul Cavanagh (106th Division) kept up conducting Mass for 100 PoWs despite the firing going on outside.

During the attack on the camp, Sergeant Donald Yoerk had his tank fire a pot-shot shell at the Lager water tower. Though the Lager records do not record any damage to the tower, there are many witnesses to confirm that he did indeed puncture the reservoir. One inmate, Bob Reppa of the 14th Cavalry Group (captured in the Bulge at Honsfeld), clearly remembers it 'gushing frothy water'.



Today, the view from the French Cross is different, the Bundeswehr having built a new barracks complex — the Saaleck-Kaserne — between it and the old camp, and trees now obstructing the view.

Ironically enough, Patton's son-in-law, John Waters, was critically wounded in the very operation that was designed to rescue him, being shot through the hip when he left the stockade trying to arrange a truce. Brought to the camp hospital *(right)*, his life was saved by two Serb doctors. In this same hospital, American doctors later hid Baum from the Germans after his task force had been defeated. Both Waters and Baum were still there when the camp was finally liberated on April 6.

At Goode's office, a request came in that someone from among the American PoWs contact the attackers to tell them they were hitting the prisoners' compounds. In American accounts, the request is said to have been made by von Goeckel, but German historians doubt this. According to them, the camp commander never left his HQ once the battle got started. They assume the request came from the Serb senior officer, Colonel-General Brastich, and was an independent initiative by von Goeckel's liaison officer and interpreter, Hauptmann Hans Fuchs.

John Waters volunteered to contact the Americans. With three others — Captain Emil Stutter and Lieutenants George Meskall and Jim Mills — and accompanied by Hauptmann Fuchs, he set out through the main gate, the five men carrying both an American and a white flag. Suddenly, a German soldier appeared from behind a building along the road and fired at the group. Waters went down, hit below the right hip, the bullet smashing the bone, chipping his coccyx and exiting from his left buttock. He was numb from the waist down. 'You son of a bitch, you've ruined my fishing', Waters thought. The German soldier approached menacingly, forcing Fuchs to stand against the wall. Frantically, Fuchs explained their mission. The soldier ordered them back into the camp. Mills and Stutter carried Waters in a blanket to the nearby German hospital outside the gates, but the attendants there insisted they had no room. Hauling Waters back through the camp gate, the two met Dragon Yosefovitch, the Serbian liaison officer and a good friend of Waters. He ordered up two Serbs with a stretcher to bring Waters to the PoW hospital, then asked Colonel Radovan Danich, the Serb surgeon, and his assistant, Giry Georgevitch, to operate on the American. With only paper bandages and a table knife, the two performed a successful first operation, thereby saving Waters' life.

The tanks crash through the prison fence. Although frequently used to illustrate the Hammelburg raid, again this is not TF Baum on March 27, but the 47th Tank Battalion of the 14th Armored on April 6. (USNA) *Overleaf:* **Comparison in colour.**

MH 2

The picture is accurate in that it shows the Serbian compound of the Oflag, which is indeed where Baum's tanks first broke the wire. This is where the actual gap was made, as seen from the hut steps and looking towards the French Cross. The buildings in the background are post-war.

By now, the fight was nearly over. Rallying after their initial setback, the tanks, firing from hull-down positions, had silenced the German defenders. The German guards had left their foxholes and machine gun towers, and were withdrawing. Seeing two PoWs raising an American flag at the camp flagpole, Lieutenant Weaver speeded his light tank forward and smashed straight into the wire fence at the Serb compound. The other tanks followed (some accidentally crushing the bodies of fallen infantrymen). Sergeant Yoerk drove his tank along the length of the fence, crushing it under the treads.

The fight for the camp had lasted about two hours. As soon as the firing ceased, Goode gave out orders for the American PoWs to pack up. Forming up in a column of fives, carrying sacks and blanket rolls, they marched triumphantly past the cheering Serbs, out through the hole in the fence, and up the hill to where the main body of the task force stood silhouetted against the sky, lit up by the pile of burning straw. The first part of the column broke ranks as it reached the tanks. The PoWs stormed the vehicles, kissing and hugging the crews. The tankers handed out food and cigarettes to the freed men, excitedly telling them of the trains they had shot up and the fights they had had. This was the happiest, most precious moment of the entire operation.

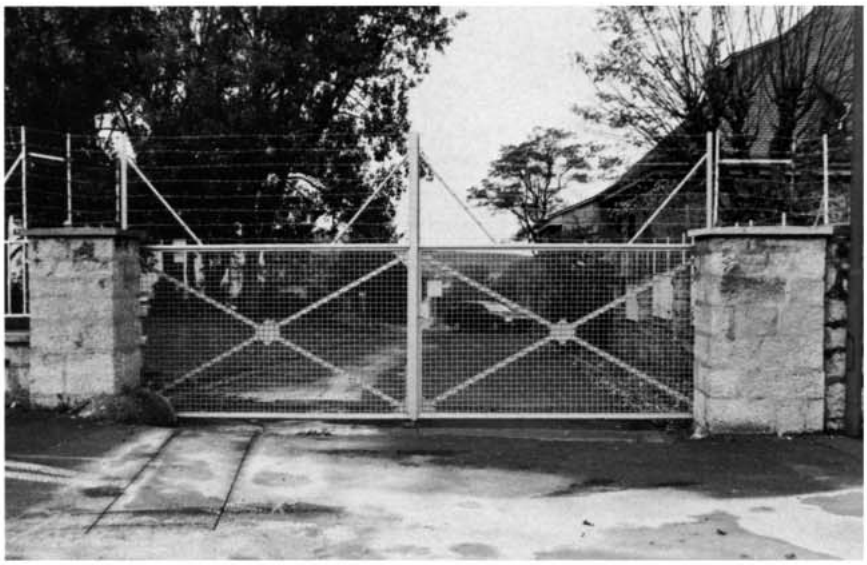
By now, it was 1830 and almost dark. Sitting in his Jeep, inundated by prisoners, Baum felt thrilled at what he had accomplished. Having got this far, 50 miles in little over 18 hours, against opposition, through unfamiliar terrain, was indeed an incredible feat of navigation and perseverance; the attack on the camp and freeing the prisoners was an outstanding success. Baum radioed a message: 'Mission accomplished. Request air cover.' (The signal reached CCB at 0300, March 28.) However, it was not really true. He had not accomplished his mission, only reached his objective. The fight was far from over.

By now, only about half of the original force was still in fighting shape. The dead and the seriously wounded had been left behind along the side of the road. The wounded still with the column lay on the fuel cans in the half-tracks or helped steady each other at the machine guns.

Although he had liberated the camp, Baum was shocked at the number of prisoners. He had been led to expect some 300 Americans, but he could see there were far more than that (Sources vary, but there were then between 1,300 and 1,500 Americans in the camp.) He was just getting annoyed over the absence of any apparent leadership, when Colonel Goode came up. Taking him aside, Baum informed him his orders were not to stay but to return with as many prisoners as possible, and told Goode it was up to him to break the news and make the selection of who was going and who was staying. He then went off to reorganise his column. However, to Baum's frustration, Goode and his staff seemed unable to decide what to do, so he climbed on his Jeep and addressed the crowd. Explaining he could not take all of them on the vehicles, he pointed west and said the front lines were 50 miles away, probably closer now. Those that wanted to try, could walk with the column, but he warned they would probably have to fight their way out. There were no maps for them, no weapons, no food. Baum could hear the groans of resentment and disappointment from among the PoWs. He felt despair and anger at having been sent to do a job that was impossible.

Meanwhile, Major Stiller had gone off to find Waters. From asking around, he learned with distress that Patton's son-in-law had been seriously wounded. At the hospital, he found that the Serb doctors had just finished

Infantrymen and tankers shoot off the lock of one of the camp gates for the benefit of the Signal Corps cameramen (this same scene is preserved in a film clip). (USNA)



It is in fact a gate along the main road, located next to the present-day main entry of the Bundeswehr Infantry School. The huts visible in the wire-crashing picture can be seen in the background.

operating on him. Waters was out of danger, but there was still a chance that he would remain paralysed from the waist down. Stiller realised he would be unable to bring Waters back.

When Baum had finished his speech, Goode asked for a show of hands of those that wanted to go with the task force. Sizing up their chances, several hundred men turned around and returned to the camp. The others ran to the tanks and half-tracks to find a place for themselves. Each tank could take ten to twelve men. The crews had to tell some men to get off as they were blocking the driver's view or the main gun. Some had to be pushed off. Others had to dump sacks or blankets to make room for more passengers. Some 200 Kriegies were finally mounted on the tanks and on or in the half-tracks. Those eager to help fight took M1s and machine guns from the wounded infantrymen.

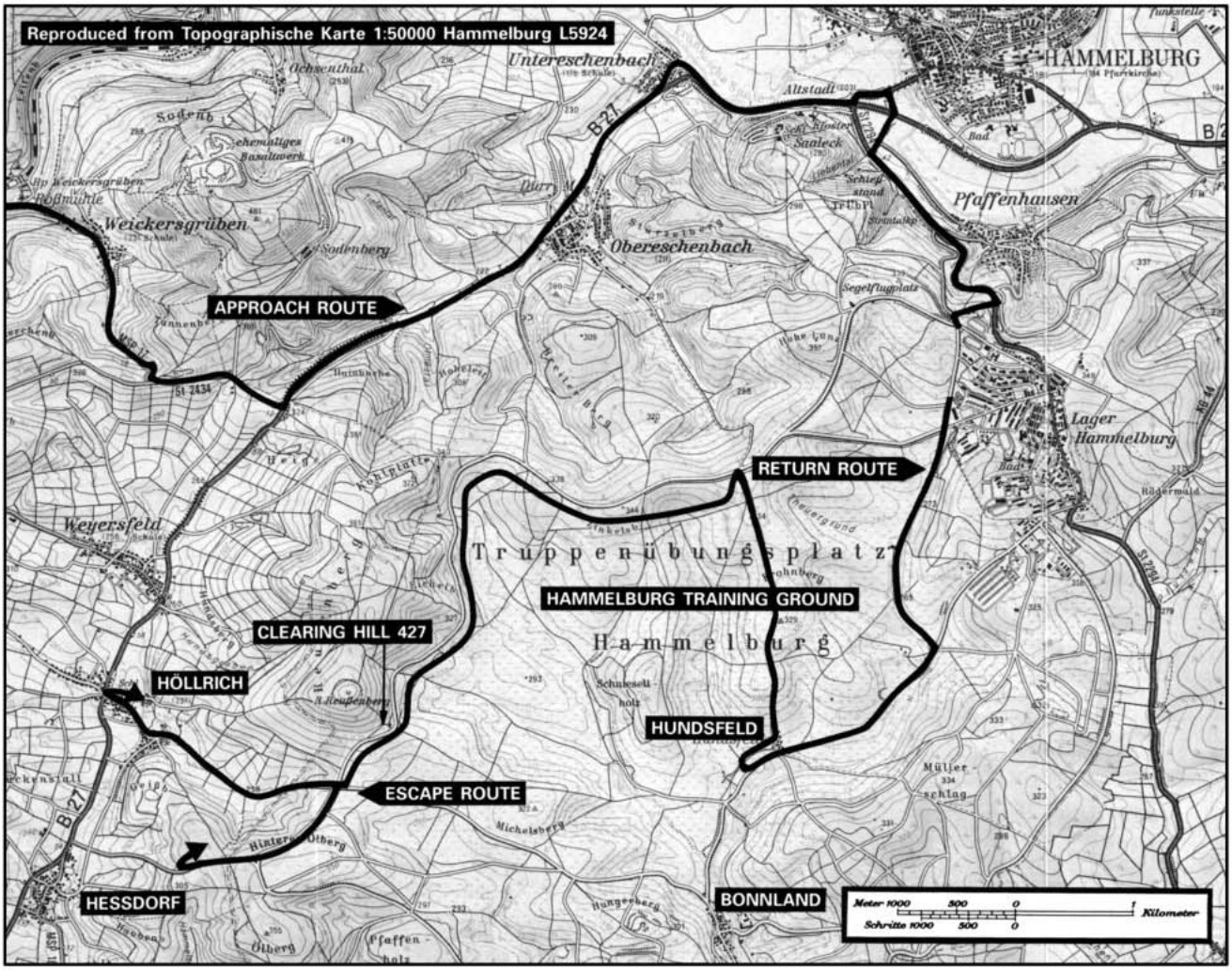
Baum was impatient to leave. He did not plan on returning westward the way he had come. Before the mission, he had been told the 4th Armored would head in a north-easterly direction, so he had originally wanted to go north, hoping to meet one of their columns. However, that route he now knew blocked by German armour, so he now decided to go south-west, pick up the B27, hope to find a bridge across the Main, and reach Seventh Army. He ordered Nutto to take the six remaining Shermans and three of the infantry half-tracks, and reconnoitre the route to the south. Just then, Stiller returned with the news about Waters. Baum said little, feeling he had more important things on his mind. He ordered the other vehicles to form up while they awaited the result of Nutto's probe: light tanks at the front, then five half-tracks, the assault guns, the one remaining recon Jeep, and the rest of the half-tracks bringing up the rear.

Nutto's group was just starting out when, all of a sudden, a tank (probably one of the light tanks) was hit by a Panzerfaust and burst into flames. (The hit has been attributed both to Oberleutnant Niessner from Köhl's unit, who had dismounted to hunt the enemy on foot, and to an 18-year-old sniper from Mestmacher's group.) Nutto continued on his probe. Going south, he followed the unpaved road to Hundsfeld and Bonnland, the training villages. Neither he nor Baum knew that they were in fact moving deeper into an army training area.

The tank was knocked out here, at the north-eastern tip of the Lager, at the intersection of the road up from Hammelburg and the turn-off to the French Cross. The petrol station is post-war.

Again not the real thing, but very much like it. After Baum broke into the camp, his column reformed on the crest of the hill, soon to be joined by the 1,500-odd freed American PoWs. (The blazing barn in this picture is a good stand-in for the burning straw-stack which lit the scene when Baum was there.) There were far more prisoners than Baum had been led to expect, and he realised he could not take all. (USNA)

As dusk fell and Baum was getting ready for the return trip, a Panzerfaust-armed German managed to sneak in on the column and knock out one tank. Although most accounts suggest it was a Sherman, this picture proves it was in fact one of Baum's M5A1 Stuart light tanks. This picture by Tech/5 Bowen is also the only one of the April 6 series that specifically refers to the Baum raid, the caption noting that the disabled tank belonged to 'General Patton's forces which made a previous attempt to free prisoners'. (USNA)



To find his way out, Baum sent out a probe force of six Shermans and three half-tracks under Lieutenant Nutto (badly wounded at Gemünden, but back in action). Going south, Nutto got as far as Hundsfeld, one of the training villages in the Hammelburg training area (see aerial on page 20), where a road-block forced him to change his course. Hundsfeld was incorporated into the training area in 1938. The map shows the terrain as it appears today.

With General von Goeckel feeding him information from his grandstand HQ building, Oberst Hoppe kept abreast of the Americans' every movement, and he set out to tie the noose around them. At Bonnland he had the 60-odd combat engineers from the Pionierschule Berlin under Major Diepenbeck, and these he ordered to set up a series of road-blocks to seal off that direction. With him at the Lager were Oberst Mestmacher's 80-odd snipers with which he could seal off the north. In the east, at Fuchsstadt, were Hauptmann Köhl's Hetzers. Once refuelled, they would form a powerful mobile reserve.

And to the west, a new force had arrived: the group of 60-70 officer cadets from Grafenwöhr under Hauptmann Franz Gehrig. Alerted by Wehrkreis XIII, this force had travelled in two busses to Gemünden, only to find the battle there had already been fought, then turned east towards Hammelburg. En route, Gehrig had telephoned Hoppe who told him to seal off the western side of the training area. Gehrig's cadets, armed with Panzerfausts and carbines, were now getting into position along the B27, blocking possible exits from the training area at the villages of Höllrich and Hessdorf. At Hessdorf, unarmed Hitlerjugend and Volkssturm gave a hand by erecting road-blocks.

After the war, the houses and farms were cleared away, only foundations remaining in the copse on the left. Of the original village, only the cemetery has been preserved.

The Hundsfeld road-block had been erected by a detachment of 60 combat engineers under Hauptmann Diepenbeck, who happened to be on a street-fighting course at Bonnland, one mile further down the road. Evacuated like Hundsfeld in 1938, Bonnland is still a Bundeswehr training village today.

Nutto's progress in the inky darkness was slow. To avoid ditches, tank traps and ambushes, whenever the terrain was shielded, he stopped the column and went out on foot alone. It took an hour to reach Hundsfeld. Seeing it empty and not knowing it was a training village, the Americans thought the inhabitants must be hiding in the cellars. At the far end, Nutto spotted a log road-block. He radioed Baum, who came down in his Jeep to see for himself. Baum sensed the Germans were there and, deciding a night attack was too risky, told Nutto to back up and turn to the north-west at the Hundsfeld intersection. If it was open, this road would lead to Obereschenbach and the B27. By now, it was 2130.

Left: **In the dark, Nutto searched for a way out. Turning north-west, he went right across the training area, only to bump into another German screen, which forced him to turn left, skirting the Reussenberg or Hill 427. Seen here from the direction of Bonnland, Hill 427 still dominates the entire area.** *Right:* **Just past Hill 427, Nutto came to an intersection. The track to the right led to Höllrich, the one straight on to Hessdorf. Nutto turned right, towards Höllrich.**

Baum sped back to the main force and told Lieutenant Hoffner to probe the new road ahead of Nutto with the one surviving recon Jeep. It was a rutted track leading into a hillier area (and right across the training area). Soon, Nutto's force heard firing up ahead, and Hoffner's Jeep came back with news that there was a road-block with Germans dug in on a hill (Hill 340) above.

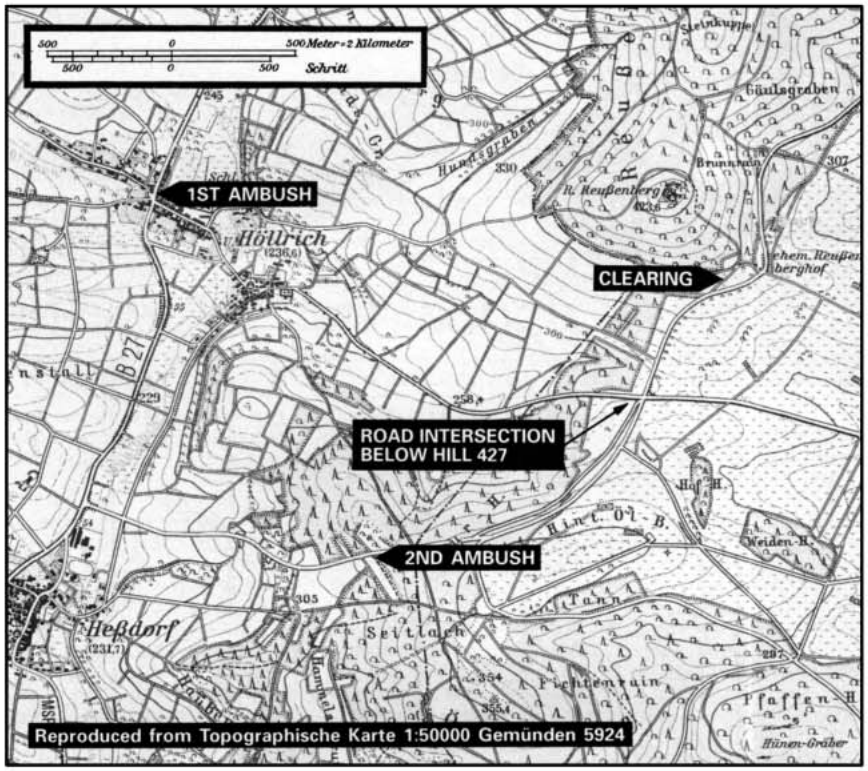
Again, Baum changed course, ordering Nutto to turn west onto a trail that his map showed should lead to the village of Höllrich and the B27, about 4½ miles away. He himself went back to the main force, taking Hoffner's Jeep, whose driver had broken down in tears, with him. Arriving there, he could see his men were worried, and hear the bitching and criticism of the tired, worried PoWs over the long delay. Many of his own men took advantage of the delay to catch some sleep but, during the night, more than 1,000 PoWs slipped away to walk dejectedly back into the camp.

Meanwhile, Nutto probed through the dark night. The new route curved around the base of Hills 340 and 427, following the woods line, then descended down a draw to Höllrich. Cautiously, the force moved through the silent village. By now, the PoWs riding on the tanks were stiff from cold. Limping ahead to the far end of the village, Nutto saw the highway. This was it. Quickly, he radioed Baum, who was elated and immediately ordered the main force to move out to rejoin Nutto. Meanwhile, Nutto was to scout out the highway. It was midnight.

Left: **Entering Höllrich from the east.** *Right:* **Commanding the German cordon at Höllrich and Hessdorf was Hauptmann Franz Gehrig. (ISH)**

However, when Nutto's tanks ventured out onto the highway, they were ambushed by the Grafenwöhr cadets that had dug in around the intersection just a few hours previously. Panzerfausts hit the first Sherman. PoWs jumped or fell off its deck. Nutto, in the turret, was numbed by the concussion, then pushed out from below, falling down the side of the tank onto the road. Machine gun fire criss-crossed the road. The second Sherman rammed into the lead one and, as it tried to disengage, was also hit. (Many men distinctly remember seeing a Tiger tank but, according to German sources, the Höllrich defenders had no armour, only Panzerfausts.) The remaining four Shermans backed up, trying to turn and retreat up the narrow village street. The men riding them leaped off dashing for cover. One Sherman hit a stone wall, nearly crushing the dangling legs of the men on the deck. Further back, the three half-tracks were turning around too. At last, the surviving vehicles hurried back the way they had come. Some men were able to jump back on, others trudged back on foot.

At last finding an escape route to the B27, Nutto's probe group was ambushed here, at the Höllrich intersection, losing two tanks to bazooka fire. Those behind backed up (in the street on the left) and got away.



They made it back to the group waiting at the intersection. (The original accounts of what happened that night are so sketchy that it led several authors to reconstruct a different sequence of events: according to this version, Baum's force went *first* to Hessdorf, reached it, turned north up the B27, and *then* ran into the ambush at Höllrich, losing three tanks in one fight there. These authors were also unaware that Baum had split up his force, and thought the whole group went on the probe. The truth only transpired when Baum published his own account in 1981.)

Baum had to face the fact he could not get out tonight. There were simply no more roads to try. He decided to reorganise on Hill 427 and try again in the morning. It was about 0330 when he and the probe group got back to the clearing. He was unaware that he had taken up position in the middle of an army training area.

Hammelburg Lager is still a military camp, now housing the Bundeswehr Infantry School and Hill 427, the site of Baum's last stand, is within the restricted area, as are Hundsfeld and Bonnland. To enter the military camp or the training area requires permission from the Truppenübungsplatz commander. Visits are usually arranged through the US Liaison Officer or the Bundeswehr Presse-Offizier. On the other hand, Höllrich and Hessdorf, where the probing force was ambushed, are outside the training area, and can be freely visited.

Speeding along ahead of the main column, Baum met the ambush survivors outside Höllrich. The news — two tanks lost, and the trusted Nutto captured — shocked him, but he quickly recovered. He saw one more chance. There was another road that bypassed Höllrich and led to Hessdorf, two miles further south on the B27. This time he sent only two Shermans. He ordered the PoWs off, telling them to wait at the intersection with the three half-tracks. He radioed Weaver and Hoffner to disperse the main column in a clearing on the side of a hill on their right — marked Hill 427 on US maps, but locally known as the Reussenberg, the highest hill in the area — and await orders. Baum followed the two-tank probe in his Jeep. It was 0230, March 28.

The trail to Hessdorf, sloping down through the woods, was so narrow Baum could not pull up beside the tanks. Suddenly, a Panzerfaust let go and hit the lead Sherman. Baum quickly edged his Jeep off the road to allow the second tank to reverse. The survivors of the first spilled out and ran back, jumping aboard the Jeep and the other tank.

A final attempt was aborted when another Sherman was bazooka'd on the track leading down to Hessdorf.

Realising he could not get out that night, Baum concentrated his depleted force in a clearing on the side of Hill 427. This was to be the site of his final stand.

The clearing was a relatively flat, good-sized, semi-circular open space. To the south and east was a clear view of the valley that sloped gently down from the plateau. The west and north were heavily forested, with the north side rising steeply up the Reussenberg. In the clearing, just above the road, stood two old farm buildings, one a small farmhouse built of stone, the other a wooden sheep-fold, both deserted. The task force's vehicles took up a defensive perimeter around the buildings, the tanks in the centre, the assault guns to the left, and the half-tracks on the right near the barn.

Baum took stock of his situation. He had three Sherman tanks and four light tanks left, the three 105mm assault guns, some 20 half-tracks and four Jeeps. He had lost his two company commanders, Nutto and Lange, and quite a few of his men. The half-tracks were full of wounded, several of them serious. In all, he could barely scrape together two platoons, about 110 men. By now, his men were so tired they fell asleep at every opportunity.

His main concern now was fuel. He immediately held a conference and found out how much fuel there remained. There was enough for a 40-odd mile trip. Baum ordered the fuel out of eight of the half-tracks to be siphoned to give the tanks a greater radius, and these eight vehicles then to be destroyed by burning.

By now, it was clear that the majority of the PoWs did not want to go on. Milling around and talking in small groups, they concluded they had better return to the camp. When Baum said he was willing to take the ones that wanted to fight, Goode climbed onto a tank and put the choice to his men. There were only a dozen who opted to stay. At about 0500, some 200 Kriegies began the march back to the camp, led by Goode with a white flag. On the way, they heard engine noises and the sound of men digging in. The Germans were closing in. Nobody thought of sending a man back to inform Baum.

Back at the Lager, von Goeckel was busy regaining control of the Oflag. When Baum freed the camp, the Royalist Serb PoWs had broken into the German rifle store and armed themselves, manning the deserted German posts to keep order in their compound. However, near midnight, the 80-odd reserve officer cadets from ROB-Lehrgang XIII from Ansbach arrived in the Lager and, with their help, von Goeckel's Landesschützen managed to disarm the Serbs. By the time Goode's group returned, von Goeckel was back in command.

During the night, Oberst Hoppe prepared to destroy the hemmed-in Americans. To better coordinate the attack on Hill 427, he moved his HQ to a command post bunker at Hundsfeld, which had telephone lines to the observation bunkers strewn across the range. Hoppe ordered these bunkers manned, the crews to observe and report all enemy movements. Hoppe planned an attack from four sides. On his orders, Köhl at 0500 moved his refuelled Hetzers to Bonnland. The Germans had the advantage of knowing the terrain, many of the troops taking part in the battle having actually trained there. Hill 427 itself was part of a tank range, and the German gunners knew the distances.

Back on Hill 427, Baum's force prepared for the break-out. Just before daylight, the seriously wounded were put in the stone building which was marked with a big red cross fashioned from silk recognition panels. They had to be left behind. At first light, the petrol-siphoning began. Some men used pumps to fill the jerrycans, others just cut the fuel lines underneath the vehicles. Because Baum had only five of his own officers and Stiller left, he asked three of the PoW officers that had stayed — 1st Lieutenants John E. Floyd and William Meiggs and 2nd Lieutenant Richard Baron, all of the 45th Division — each to take command of an infantry squad in the half-tracks. Then he gave out his march instructions. They would aim south for Karlstadt. Towns were to be avoided. If necessary, half-tracks were to be driven into the water to serve as bridges when crossing streams. Baum walked from vehicle to vehicle to give his men a last pep talk. Now that they were all together in a compact group, most of them were confident and optimistic about fighting their way back. Baum stepped into his Jeep. The column had just begun to roll, when the Germans attacked. The time was 0810 hours.

Using the many telephone-linked observation post bunkers on the range, the Germans were able to keep track of Baum's movements and to coordinate their forces for the final attack. The original OPs were blown up by the US Army after 1945. In the background is a modern post used for the training of UN peace-keeping forces.

In 1945, an old farmstead known as the Reussenberg-Hof occupied the clearing. On the morning of March 28, Baum had his seriously wounded put in the stone farmhouse, and the site marked with a red cross. However, the subsequent German attack completely destroyed the farm, burying the men inside under its rubble. All that remains today is the concrete floor.

The panorama from the clearing. The main German attack came in across the open valley in front. Hammelburg Lager is in the far

The main attack came from the east, from Hundsfeld and across the wide expanse of the training area. Here, Köhl's five Hetzers attacked, supported by Diepenbeck's 60 combat engineers from Bonnland. From the west came Gehrig's 70 Panzerfaust-armed Grafenwöhr cadets; some 20 of them opened fire from the north-west, having infiltrated through the woods behind Hill 427 during the night. From Hill 340 in the north came Mestmacher's 80-strong sniper force. Several American accounts say the attack on Hill 427 included six Tiger tanks, but this is not so. There were no Tigers at Hill 427 or anywhere in the Hammelburg area. Nor did the attacking force include Waffen-SS troops, as is sometimes stated.

A hail of shells engulfed the clearing. Several of Baum's vehicles were hit in the first salvo, and erupted in flames. The infantry spilled from the half-tracks and ran for cover amid geysers of earth. Baum: 'Up to this time, I had never seen the Krauts pull a good coordinated attack with artillery cover and tanks backing up the infantry the way they should. But this was the time. They hit us with the fastest tank fire I had ever seen. It was like automatic fire.'

Baum's tanks and assault guns returned the fire as best they could, jockeying for position on the hill, but they stood little chance. The gun commanded by Tech/4 Casanova fired three smoke shells in an attempt to screen the force. Two direct hits wounded him and his crew but Casanova continued firing his crippled gun singlehanded until a third hit finally put it out of action. Within a few minutes, most American vehicles were hit. In the command half-track, radio operator Sidles frantically tapped out his last message: 'TF Baum surrounded. Under heavy fire. Request air support'. He stuck to working his wireless until a shell destroyed the vehicle. The infantry, taking shelter behind the vehicles or the farm buildings, was completely pinned down by the shells exploding around them. The building with the Red Cross marking was holed by armour-piercing shells and collapsed on top of the wounded inside.

The sudden inferno, the accuracy of the enemy fire, the destruction wrought in such a short time was overwhelming. It was then that Baum realised he had lost control of the situation, that he had lost the task force. 'Every man for himself', he shouted. Those that could ran for the woods behind them. Only about 100 made it. Several times, they tried to get back to see what they could salvage but each time the German infantry opened up with small arms and the advancing Hetzers started firing again. Baum shouted to his platoon leaders to order the men to split up in groups of four and take off in a westerly direction. Task Force Baum's last stand was over. The entire fight had lasted 25 minutes.

Many accounts of Baum's last stand claim that the Germans had Tiger tanks at Hill 427, but this was not the case. The only amour supporting the 200-odd German infantrymen were the five Hetzer tank destroyers remaining after the tank battle outside Hammelburg of the day before. *Above:* **No Hetzers in attack on Hill 427 today, only modern Bundeswehr Marders engaged in driver instruction.**

Panzerfaust-armed cadets from the Höllrich force infiltrated the wooded slopes of Hill 427 to engage the encircled Americans from behind. Near the medieval tower that crowns the hilltop, a Bundeswehr squad stands in for their ancestors of 50 years ago.

distance on the left, Hundsfeld and Bonnland are beyond the crest on the right. The checkerboard hut is a modern range OP.

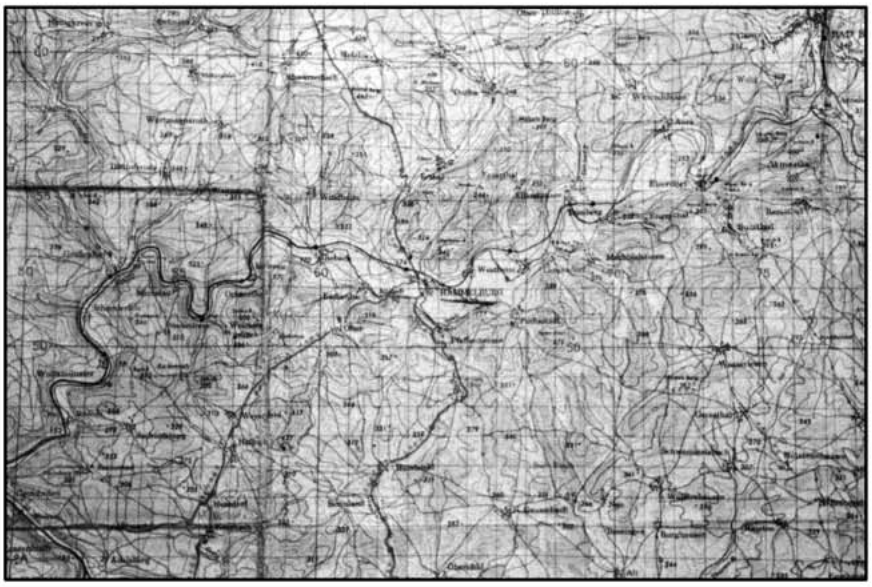
Those Americans pinned down or left wounded in the clearing surrendered to the approaching German infantry. Those in the woods did not get very far either, the Germans soon capturing most of them. Many of the fleeing Americans heard dogs barking and were convinced the Germans had set bloodhounds on their trail. However, their impression was wrong. The Lager garrison did not have a dog company, so the dogs they heard must have been from surrounding farms and foresters.

Baum himself took off with Stiller and Sidles. The Germans were all around. Just before dark, a German sergeant with a rifle came straight for them. From 25 feet away, the German laid down the rifle, pulled a P-38 pistol, took careful aim, and shot Baum. The bullet cut through Baum's inner thigh, burning the side of his scrotum. 'You son of a bitch, you shot my ball off', Baum shouted. The German laughed; he understood English (before the war he had lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut). The three Americans surrendered. In an unnoticed moment, Baum threw away his dog-tags which identified him as Jewish. They and others rounded up were marched back to the clearing. There, a surprised and protesting Stiller was separated from the group. Because he was a major, the Germans thought he was the task force commander.

The prisoners were marched back to the camp via Hundsfeld. Now wounded for the third time and in great pain, Baum could barely walk and Sidles had to support him. Too weak to keep up, Baum lay down on a stone wall and told Sidles to leave him. Later, German soldiers found him and brought him to the camp in a horse-drawn wagon.

Many accounts state that all of Baum's vehicles were destroyed on Hill 427, but this is not true. Several of the tanks and half-tracks were still operable; the latter were in fact used to shuttle survivors back to the camp. The salvaged vehicles were then lined up outside the Lager main gate. The Shermans were in fact later used in the defence of Hessdorf against the 14th Armored Division.

A unique relic of TF Baum. Most of the practice targets on the Hammelburg range are post-war Bundeswehr or Soviet-type AFVs, but Karel had heard rumours that there was a wartime Sherman somewhere among them. Cruising the training ground in the Mercedes 4×4 made available by the training area command with his guides, Winfried Leipold (in picture) and Hanns-Helmut Schnebel, he was about to give up hope when, suddenly, there it was; and, piled next to it, the remains of three M3 half-tracks. The Sherman being an M4A3 of the 1945 type, and these being the only wartime and American AFVs on the range, and less than a mile from where TF Baum met its end, it seems a reasonable assumption that these are in fact wrecks of historical importance: the last surviving relics of TF Baum.



Left: **Winfried Leipold grew up in the Lager (his father was a school teacher there) and, as a boy of 10, witnessed the battle for the Oflag and saw the captured Americans being brought back to the camp after their defeat on Hill 427. One of the captured half-tracks broke down at the southern end of the Lager, and, searching it for souvenirs, young Winfried found a map of the Hammelburg area with the name of his home town underlined with ball-pen ink** *(right).* **It is a unique relic of the raid, all the more so since only 15 maps were distributed among the whole of Task Force Baum.**

In the camp, the recaptured PoWs and task force members were herded into the Lager's huge horseback riding ring. Baum was taken to the camp hospital where some 35 of his men were being treated as well. The senior American doctor, Major Albert L. Berndt (112th Infantry, 28th Division), and his assistant, 2nd Lieutenant William Dennis (327th Glider Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, captured at Bastogne), on learning from Baum that he was the task force commander the Germans were looking for, put him down as a returned Kriegie. To further hide him, they put his bed in the medicaments store room at the end of the corridor.

The previous night, back in control of the camp and on orders from Berlin, von Goeckel had begun to evacuate the American PoWs from the Oflag. The first group, those who had not gone with Baum, were marched off to Nuremberg in the morning. The second group, those who returned to the camp with Goode, were marched down to Hammelburg station and put on trains to the same destination. At Nuremberg, the reunited groups were bombed by B-17s. Some 60 PoWs were wounded, among them Colonel Cavender. A third group, those rounded up prior to April 2, was also trained to Nuremberg. On the way, they were attacked by Allied fighter-bombers. From Nuremberg, the assembled groups were shipped to the huge Stalag VII-A camp at Moosburg, 40 miles north of Munich.

On March 29, von Goeckel began evacuating the wounded too, German ambulances moving some 18 Americans to Bad Kissingen. As soon as he was allowed out of bed and out of hiding, Baum checked on his men remaining in the hospital. John Waters was in the same ward and the two men talked at length about the war, the Third Army and the Hammelburg raid. Both men suspected that Patton's main reason for the raid had been to rescue Waters, but neither brought it up.

Meanwhile, back at Third Army, people puzzled over the fate of the task force. After Baum's 'mission accomplished' signal, no more radio messages had been received by the 4th Armored Division, and it appeared as if the force had vanished in thin air. On March 27, Patton wrote his wife: 'Last night, I sent a column to a place 40 miles east of Frankfurt where John and some 900 prisoners are said to be. I have been nervous as a cat all day as everyone but me thought it too great a risk. I hope it works. Al Stiller went along. If I loose that column, it will possibly be a new incident, but I won't loose it.' Early on the 29th, 4th Armored Division HQ reported: 'No news of Baum'.

Then, at 2000 on March 29, German radio boasted that a great victory had been won over American tanks at Hammelburg: 'The spearheads of the 4th American armoured division which penetrated from Aschaffenburg to Gemünden/Hammelburg were destroyed by a counter-attack. Twenty tanks were destroyed, nine heavy and three light tanks and 21 half-tracks captured, and 250 prisoners brought in.' German propaganda claimed that a whole armoured division had been defeated and the entire Third Army been checked.

American war reporters were puzzled by the unexplained reports of US tanks deep in the enemy rear and questioned Patton at a press conference next day. He said: 'There has been a black-out on an operation we pulled about 60 miles from this point. There was a prisoner-of-war camp containing at least 900 Americans — mostly officers, both ground and air. I felt that I could not sleep during the night if I got within 60 miles and made no attempt to take that place. I felt by hazarding a small force I would confuse the enemy completely as to where we were going. It did work for they thought I was going to Nuremberg. I don't know whether that force has been captured or what. If they have the Third Army luck, they might get through.'

The captured American vehicles were line up outside the Lager main gate. Winfried Leipold has horrible memories of how one vehicle, backing up, accidentally drove over one of the American stretcher cases, crushing the wounded man's skull.

Mainfränkische Zeitung

AMTLICHES ORGAN DER NSDAP. UND DER STAATS- UND GEMEINDEBEHÖRDEN

Nr. 75 — Jahrgang 1945 Würzburg, Ostern, 31. März, 1./2. April 1945

Das Beispiel von Hammelburg

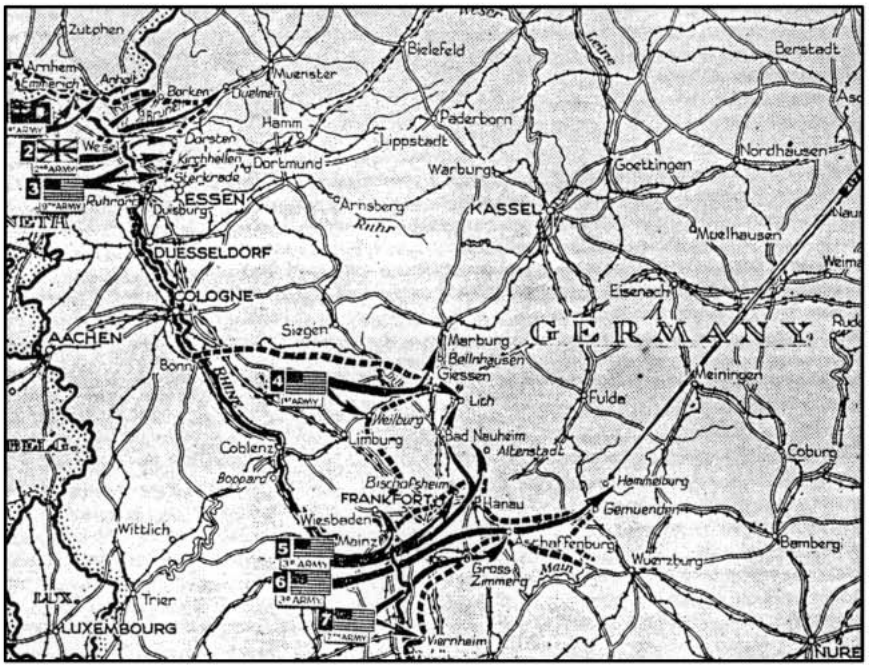
Von Krieg und Kriegsgeschrei

'The Example of Hammelburg.' Nazi propaganda made great play out of their victory over TF Baum, claiming the whole of Third Army had been stopped. This is the Easter edition of the *Mainfränkische Zeitung*. (courtesy W. Leipold)

As he spoke, a score of escaped Hammelburg PoWs and a few of Baum's men were still on the loose, making their way like hunted animals back to the American lines. On April 4, a week after the raid, two PoW lieutenants entered Third Army lines and personally gave Patton a first report of what had happened. Theirs was the first real confirmation that Waters had been in the camp. That evening, Lieutenant General Alexander Patch of Seventh Army called Patton to say that three other escapees had come in and had reported Waters badly wounded and recaptured.

Of Baum's own men, only 15 made it back. The first to do so was Tech/Sergeant Graham, the assault gun platoon leader. The three men he had taken off with were captured after two miles, but Graham escaped, walking on for six days without food. Approaching the front line on April 3, he captured three German officers whom he forced to tell him where the Americans were. Trying to avoid a company of infantry which he thought was German, he was spotted and taken in. They were Americans from the 45th Division. Recuperating with the 45th, Graham was not able to report to Third Army until the 6th.

The 4th Armored Division had suffered its greatest single loss of the war. On April 6 at Gotha, the 37th Tank Battalion reported four officers and 73 men missing in action. Likewise, the 10th Armored Infantry listed its six officers and 209 men as MIA.



Having been left in the dark about Baum's foray by Third Army, Allied newspapers did not know what to make of the German broadcasts about US spearheads at Hammelburg, *The New York Times* opting to depict it as the spearhead closest to Berlin.

MEMBERS OF TASK FORCE BAUM KILLED IN THE HAMMELBURG OPERATION (MARCH 26-28, 1945)

10th Armored Infantry Battalion

Corporal Lynn F. Angus	Killed March 27
Private Joy V. Baker	Killed March 27
Pfc Clarence W. Boyd	Killed March 27
Tech/4 Edwin H. Carlson	Killed March 28
Pfc Harold R. Cruse	Killed March 28
Pfc Charles C. Davenport	Killed March 27
S/Sergeant Freddie G. Humpick	Killed March 27
Tech/5 Frank J. Kandefer	Killed March 27
Captain Robert F. Lange	Wounded March 27; died probably March 28
Private John S. Longorio	Killed, probably March 27
Pfc Eugene C. McKnight	Killed March 27
Pfc Thomas J. Paddock	Killed, probably March 27
Pfc Charles T. Plog	Killed between March 26-28, exact date unknown
Pfc James E. Rogers	Killed March 27
Sergeant William T. Rowe	Killed, probably March 27
Pfc Jack W. Stanley	Died of wounds about March 28
Pfc Lawrence L. Wright Jr	Killed March 28

37th Tank Battalion

Private Ernest de Rensis	Killed March 27
Sergeant Nathan B. Doubleman	Killed March 27
Private Timothy J. Dunn	Died of wounds April 1
Private George R. Fesmire	Killed March 27
Private Joseph A. Gelazela	Killed March 27
Private Henry Y. Jackson	Killed, date unknown (*)
Tech/4 Philip R. Mancini	Died of wounds about March 27
Tech/5 Raymond S. Proffitt	Died of wounds March 27

(*) Inclusion in TF Baum not sure.

Compiled by Father Gerard Thuring and Jan Hey from unit rosters and grave registration records.

Immediately after the raid, the Germans evacuated all American prisoners, both the original inmates and Baum's captured men, from Oflag XIII-B, shipping most of them to Moosburg near Munich. Only the wounded in the camp hospital were left behind. This explains why the pictures taken on April 6 show only Serbian PoWs. Among the 70-odd Americans still in the camp on that day were Baum and Waters. (USNA)

That same day, the 14th Armored Division of Seventh Army reached Hammelburg and liberated the PoW camp for the second time in ten days. There were only about 70 Americans left, among them Waters and Baum. Patton immediately despatched the Third Army assistant chief surgeon, Colonel Charles B. Odom, to take special care of Waters. Odom motored to Hammelburg and found Waters hospitalised but in good condition. He ordered two Cub planes to fly him and Waters to the 34th Evacuation Hospital at Frankfurt, leaving Baum and the other wounded Americans behind stupefied and embittered. For three long days, they were left with only a medical orderly to look after them, sadly overlooked as the rest of the camp was being evacuated.

On the 7th, Patton visited Waters at Frankfurt. Waters' first question to him was: 'Did you know I was there?' Without missing a beat, Patton said: 'No, not for sure'. On a second visit next day, Patton presented his son-in-law with the Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster (which Waters himself did not know he had won in Tunisia two years earlier). On the 9th, Waters was flown to Paris for better treatment.

That same day, Baum, having hitched a ride, reached the Third Army's 16th Field Hospital at Gotha for further treatment of his wounds. His debriefing officers, Major D.G. Dayton and Lieutenant S.J. Tobin of 4th Armored G-2, told him Patton had classified the Hammelburg mission Top Secret and that he should keep silent about it. Still in hospital, Baum was visited by Patton who had come to pin the DSC on him. In a private conversation, Baum said: 'You know, Sir, it is difficult for me to believe that you would have sent us on that mission just to rescue one man'.

'That's right, Abe, I wouldn't', said Patton.

Baum's admiration of Patton had been severely tried by the whole affair, but he had decided not to make any trouble. However, he remained angry on one point: Baum reckoned several of his men deserved to be put up for a Medal of Honor. Such a medal requires a Congressional investigation but, because Patton had made the mission Top Secret, such an inquest was now impossible. Baum felt as if Patton had stolen from his men their rightful due.

Meanwhile, the press had got wind of the story. When reporters on April 13 questioned Patton about Waters' presence at Hammelburg, Patton assured them he had not known of that until nine days after he sent the task force. To prove his statement, he displayed his official and private diaries. 'At the moment, they are trying to make an incident out of my attempt to rescue John . . . How I hate the press', Patton wrote to his wife. He even sacked the censor officer who had released the story (which created a flurry at SHAEF, because censors were outside his authority). The scandal created by the news reports was only short-lived, although rumours continued to circulate, especially among servicemen in the European Theater. The Allied supreme commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, severely reprimanded Patton orally, but took no official action.

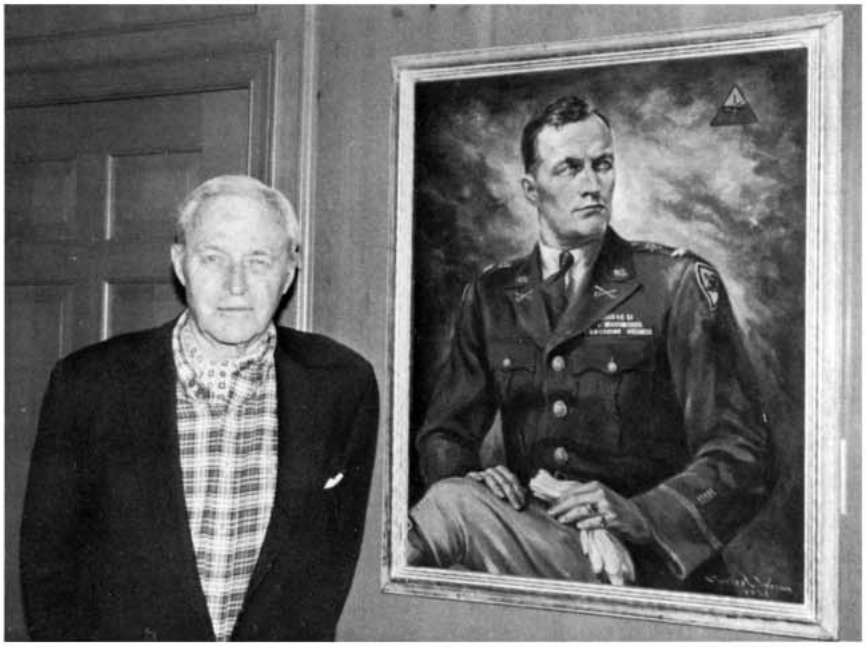
On April 14, Baum returned to the 4th Armored Division, by then at Chemnitz on the Czech border, to report for duty and finally recount his story. Abrams and Cohen were astounded and thrilled to see him back. A few days later, during an artillery barrage, Baum was seen to walk in the open, refusing to take cover. He wanted to see if he had lost his nerve, see if he could still be an effective combat leader. Though General Hoge understood Baum's motives, at the division doctors' advice he sent him on a two-week vacation to the French Riviera. The day he flew back, May 8, Germany surrendered.

On April 29, one month after the raid, the 14th Armored Division liberated the Moosburg camp, freeing 30,000 Allied troops, 14,000 of them American, many of them Hammelburg survivors. Among them was Al Stiller (whom Patton had suspected dead), in good condition but 30 pounds lighter.

So what did Task Force Baum accomplish? Although they reached their objective and freed the PoWs, they were unable to return and thus complete their main mission. On the other hand, by penetrating deep into enemy territory, shooting up German troop detachments, destroying trains, fighting battles at Gemünden and Hammelburg, tying up reserve units, and causing general confusion in rear areas, they had certainly achieved their secondary task of creating a diversion for Third Army.

However, the price had been high. All of the task force's vehicles were destroyed or captured. Of Baum's men, 32 were reported wounded, 9 killed and 16 missing. Virtually all of the others were taken prisoner at one time or another. Since then, all missing members of the task force have in fact been confirmed as having been killed, so the total death toll is 25. How many PoWs died in the action is unknown.

As soon as Patton heard his son-in-law had been found, he sent his assistant Army Surgeon, Colonel Charles Odom, to fetch him. Waters was immediately flown out by special plane to the 34th Evacuation Hospital at Frankfurt for better medical treatment. Patton visited him there on the 7th. 'He looked thin but not as thin as I had anticipated and was perfectly coherent and not in pain', he wrote to his daughter Beatrice, Water's wife. Patton asked Colonel Cutler, head Surgical Consultant of SHAEF and Dean of medicine at Harvard, to take charge of Waters' treatment.



Waters was flown to Paris for better treatment on the 9th, and later to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington. He recovered completely and continued his military career, serving in Korea and Vietnam and eventually becoming a full general. He retired in August 1966. Peter Hendrikx from the Netherlands photographed him at his home in Washington, DC, in March 1987 next to a portrait of him painted in 1951. (P. Hendrikx)

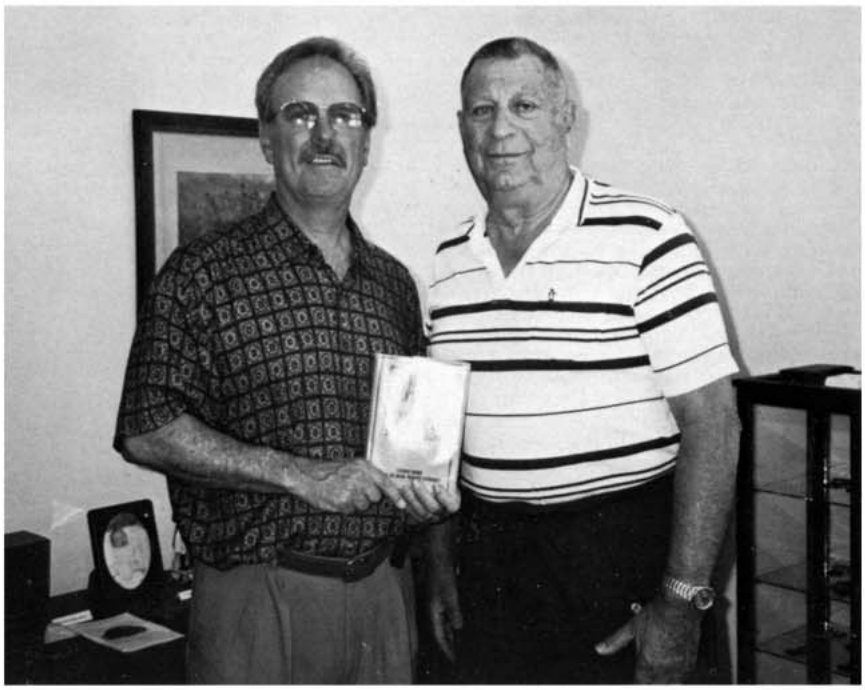
For many years after the war, the story of Task Force Baum was befogged by an atmosphere of secrecy. The very first account was by Captain Kenneth A. Koyen, the 4th Armored Public Relations Officer, in his The Fourth Armored Division. From the Beach to Bavaria, *published in 1946. Koyen did not, or could not, mention Patton's involvement, or Waters or any possible hidden motives behind the raid. However, once back in civvy street, he did so in an article titled 'General Patton's Mistake' in* The Saturday Evening Post *in 1948. Patton himself, in his post-humous memoirs* War as I knew it *(1947), gave only a sketchy account of the raid and commented only on the tactical problem involved: 'I can say this — that throughout the campaign in Europe I know of no error I made except of failing to send a combat command to Hammelburg.'*

After that, whether out of suppression or not, the story disappeared from public attention. All references to it virtually vanished from the record. In 1955, official US Army historian Martin Blumenson wrote an account of the mission in Military Review *which dismissed the son-in-law connection as 'gossip' by malicious 'rumor-mongers'. Patton's authorised biographer, Ladislas Farago, saw fit to completely overlook the raid in his* Patton: Ordeal and Triumph *(1963). It was not until 1966, when John Toland described the raid and the true reasons behind it in his bestselling* The Last Hundred Days, *that the 'affair' was rediscovered by the general public. Few remembered Koyen's article and, even today, many people think Toland was the first to disclose the secret. Charles Whiting's popular* 48 Hours to Hammelburg *(1970), vehemently critical of Patton, added new details on the German side of the story, although it was inaccurate on many other points. The discussion over the precise extent of Patton's pre-knowledge went on and was only laid to rest after Blumenson published extracts of the general's letters to his family in* The Patton Papers *in 1974. In 1981, Baum told his own story in his book* Raid. The untold Story of Patton's Secret Mission, *written with former Hammelburg inmate Richard Baron and co-writer Richard Goldhurst. The book added many new details but was unfortunately marred by quite a few errors in its description of the German side. German local experts in the Aschaffenburg-Hammelburg area were dismayed when the German translation came out in 1986.*

For the US Army, the Hammelburg operation has always held a special fascination, not so much because of the Patton/Waters affair, but because of the combat lessons it presented. In the post-war, nuclear age, the Army saw a new role for compact, independent, mobile task forces, and TF Baum presented, and still presents, a good example of that. Also, it is common knowledge that lessons are better learned from defeats. Over the years, many US Army units have held battlefield tours to Hammelburg, and the operation has been the subject of several Army student papers. (One of the first was by Captain Bob Reppa, himself a former inmate of the camp, for the Advance Class of the Armored School at Fort Knox in 1948.) Most studies agree that the force was too small for the task assigned, and concentrate on the organisational mistakes made — the lack of good maps, the poor intelligence (both about the enemy and the camp), the inadequate communications set-up, the lack of close air support and aerial reconnaissance, the failure to organise any resupply, the meagre medical arrangements. Baum's leadership stands out as a shining example.

Official casualty figures for TF Baum are 9 killed and 16 missing (the latter presumably killed). Some people have questioned this figure as being much too low, saying the heavy fighting, along the way and in the final stand, must have led to many more dead. In his 48 Hours to Hammelburg, *Charles Whiting went as far as suggesting a figure as high as 160. We therefore asked ETO casualty experts Jan Hey and Father Gerard Thuring in the Netherlands to reconstruct TF Baum's casualty list on the basis of unit rosters and grave registration records. Their research not only confirms the low figure of 25 but also showed that all the 16 listed as missing in the 1945 casualty reports have in fact been accounted for since.*

In the final analysis, the Germans had done well. With the troops at hand, mostly few, ill-armed and inexperienced, they had held up a strong armoured force, wearing it down until it lost its superiority, and finally surrounding and destroying it. They had been fortunate in that several of their small-unit commanders — Zöller at Gemünden, Köhl and Diepenbeck at Hammelburg — were experienced combat veterans. Oberst Hoppe had shown tactical sense and cool nerves. Hammelburg was a German victory, albeit a Pyrrhic one.



Abe Baum left the army in 1945 and returned to the garment trade, starting the Major Blouse Company with his father in New York, and later pursuing a career with the Rhoda Lee Blouse Co. Because of his armour expertise, he was consulted by Moshe Dayan during the Israeli 1947-48 War of Independence. He helped start the 4th Armored Division Association, serving a term as its president. In July 1995, Richard Whitaker (left), an avid student of the Hammelburg raid, visited Baum (right), now 75, at his California home. (R. Whitaker)

50 Years on

Four months earlier, in March 1995, Richard had travelled to Germany to drive the Task Force Baum route on the 50th anniversary. As it happened, his pilgrimage also coincided with the centenary of the Hammelburg Lager complex, construction of which had started in 1895. Here, in Gräfendorf, he talks with two witnesses, one of whom indicates the window where a white flag hanging from an upstairs window brought down retribution from the SS after Baum had passed through.

BY RICHARD WHITAKER

As I and my travel companion, John Dirks, arrive in Schweinheim on March 26, 1995, 50 years to the day that Captain Baum's men arrived, we encounter a chance occurrence and find that the street is blocked and barricaded for maintenance which has completely uprooted the pavement. Not much has changed in 50 years! We are well prepared to follow in the tracks of Task Force Baum exactly 50 years later and have in our car, maps, cameras, tape recorders, binoculars, and books.

Twenty-five miles on, as I approach Lohr down the scenic road which slopes rather steeply into this 'Hansel and Gretel' town, I can see the wartime road-block in my mind's eye and am surprised to find yet another road-block of a different sort in our path. It is a full-blown street fair and the village is filled with the bright colours of spring and the wonderful odour of locally-produced cheeses and smoked meats. It is here that I mail my first postcard to myself which will bear the postmark of Lohr.

At Gemünden, while standing above the roadside overlooking the bridge which has long since been rebuilt, it is starting to rain and I try to imagine what must have been going through the minds of the men who watched as their comrades were blown to pieces. The bridge still has the original Roman foundation erected for their army almost 2,000 years ago. The old ruined castle has also survived and is still standing tall in the mist above the city.

On this lazy Sunday afternoon, the town is strangely quiet with no one in sight. Shortly, a policeman drives up to find out why we have stopped here and reality returns . . . we press on further along Baum's path.

The town of Burgsinn is an old walled city and, had there been any German defenders there in 1945, it would have been simple to block the main gate into town, forcing another costly delay. I find that even after passing through the gate, the streets are so narrow that any stalled vehicle would have created additional problems.

At Gräfendorf, as the main street winds around through the town, I am again amazed to see how narrow it is and how easily it could have been blocked. About halfway through, we spot a café and stop for coffee and cake. Since the owner is in his late-50s, I ask him if he remembers the 'American Panzer' raid. At this, he becomes quite excited and immediately produces his own copy of the book *Raid* by Baum, Baron and Goldhurst. He tells me that at the time he was a small boy and was watching from the basement below where we are standing when the tanks came rumbling through. He says it was a sight he will never forget.

As we are getting into our car, he points to some second-floor windows above the shop next door and explains that his neighbours had draped a white sheet over the window sill in order to keep the Americans from firing on them. This worked fine until some SS troops came through the village later and, upon seeing the sheet, proceeded to shoot the townspeople who had hung them up!

Retracing Baum's route today is a fascinating experience. To find it requires good map reading, especially at the start at Schweinheim. Also, several towns and villages now have bypasses, so those wishing to follow the column's exact route should take care to drive right through the towns. The vital bridges at Gemünden and Burgsinn survive, although neither now carries the main road. At Hammelburg, the site of the tank battle has changed considerably: the present-day turn-off to the Lager is about 300 yards closer to Untereschenbach than it was in 1945; the old turn-off can still be seen just before the Saale bridge leading into Hammelburg town. From the new crossroads, a new bypass road, the B287, cuts across the now-defunct lower part of the Lager road. The Lager road itself has been re-aligned too, many of its hairpin turns having been straightened out into wider curves. The French Cross, from where Baum launched his attack, can be reached by a side road. L-R: Lieutenant Colonel Edward M. Bradford; Peter Martin; Richard Whitaker; Oberstleutnant Eberhard Taube; and Hanns-Helmut Schnebel.

1000 hours, March 27, 1995. Lieutenant Colonel Bradford opens the gate to the live firing area.

It is raining again as we pass by a covered bus stop in Weickersgrüben and my friend John notices three men standing smoking, seeking shelter from the rain. Could it be possible that they know of the raid and Baum's guide here, Karl Stürzenberger? The answer is an excited yes! As it turns out, one of the men was among the group of Russians in the woods near Gräfendorf. He had decided to remain in the area after the war and, furthermore, we are only 50 metres from the home of Herr Stürzenberger. A few minutes later, I ring the doorbell and it is answered by a member of the family: not Karl, but his grandson. After explaining the reason for my unannounced visit (Abe Baum had told me to look up his friend Karl when I passed through), we are immediately escorted into the family room where we are given a glass of local wine and treated like royalty. It is then that we are saddened to learn that Karl has passed away in 1991.

At Hammelburg, we are met by Oberstleutnant Eberhard Taube of the German Infanterieschule which now occupies the camp. We drive to his office prior to our entry into the compound on the 50th anniversary of the raid. In Colonel Taube's office, we are offered coffee and are introduced to Lieutenant Colonel Edward M. Bradford, the US Army liaison officer assigned to the school. Also present are Hanns-Helmut Schnebel, the school librarian and historian who assisted Abe Baum and Richard Baron when they visited the camp in 1979 in preparation for their book; and Peter Martin, the school's history teacher.

We soon find ourselves standing in the road next to the French Cross which gives us our first view of the compound from the point at which Captain Baum and his men first saw it. Standing in the location of Graham's support position near the cross, you can look back down the road which is appropriately named 'Panzerstrasse'. From here, there is an overview of the steep winding route the task force used to come up from the base of the hill and, to get a better feel for the ground, we walk about 200 yards down the road back over the crest of the hill so that we can no longer see over the area. We then proceed to the first buildings Baum's men reached which are still in use. Back in 1945, these were part of the Serb quarters and lay just inside the compound fence.

At 1000 hours, Colonel Bradford unlocks the gate at the intersection where Baum led the task force up the road to Hill 427. The gate is locked at this point as we have arrived on a live-firing day and an artillery training exercise is scheduled to begin at 1100 hours. I am now feeling a bit uneasy as I have been in this kind of situation before in my Marine Corps training at Camp Pendelton, California, and have heard of the accidents that can occur due to short or long rounds as they are called. It is also raining and a cold winter wind is blowing up the hillside towards the Reussenberg woods. At this point, we are shown the exact spot where the task force was deployed and the approximate position of the panzerjägers waiting, hidden, about 1,500 yards down the hillside. Today, sitting about 100 yards out is a burned-out personnel carrier (a modern half-track) and other target vehicles. The panorama of the battlefield from the plateau is breathtaking. The scene is also quite sobering and I feel a sudden sense of awareness or 'feeling' toward the men of Task Force Baum. It is almost as if I have stepped back in time 50 years and the drama is about to unfold.

As I walk into the dense woods behind the plateau, I can picture the mayhem that took place here on that fateful morning. Men running in all directions trying to remain alive and also attempting to escape.

As I take one last look around for a souvenir of this moment in history, I remember that Baum was still thinking clearly enough at this stage to throw his dog-tags, imprinted with the tell-tale letter 'H', into the forest as he ran. He did this because he was well aware of the many atrocity stories about Jews in Nazi captivity.

About 100 yards after leaving the woods, I begin to look in earnest for the identification discs which Abe Baum had discarded, in the hope of finding the ultimate treasure, but it is not to be. As I walk out of the forest, the others are waiting and a glance at my watch tells me that we have only 15 minutes until the live firing begins. Not wishing to relive Baum's encounter, I hasten my pace.

As we drive out of the range area, I am aware of German soldiers in 'camo' cover with radios and, yes, Panzerfausts too! They are part of the training cadre and are waiting in foxholes for the artillery fire to begin. Again, I am reminded of the task force and how real this 50th anniversary tour has become. Shortly after closing and locking the gate behind us, I hear the sounds of the guns in the distance but my mission has been completed.

The end of the journey. Richard stands in front of one of the remaining original buildings, made famous in the photograph reproduced on page 25.

SMOLENSK

By Karel Margry

The city of Smolensk lies on the upper Dnieper river, about 200 miles south-west of Moscow and about two-thirds up the main route from Warsaw to the Russian capital. The city, which rises majestically up the sloping south bank of the river, has always been of strategic importance. First mentioned in 863 as a Slav town, its position on the upper Dnieper gave it early control of the trade routes between Moscow and the West and between the Baltic and the Black Sea. It became part of Kievan Rus, but after being sacked by the Tartars in about 1237 passed to Lithuania. Moscow captured it in 1340, Lithuania in 1408, Moscow again in 1514, Poland in 1611 after a siege of 20 months, and Russia in 1654. The city's 6-kilometre-long, 5.5-metre-thick and 15-metre-high walls were built by the Moscovites in 1596-1602, to which the Poles added the high earth rampart of the Korolevsky Bastion after 1611.

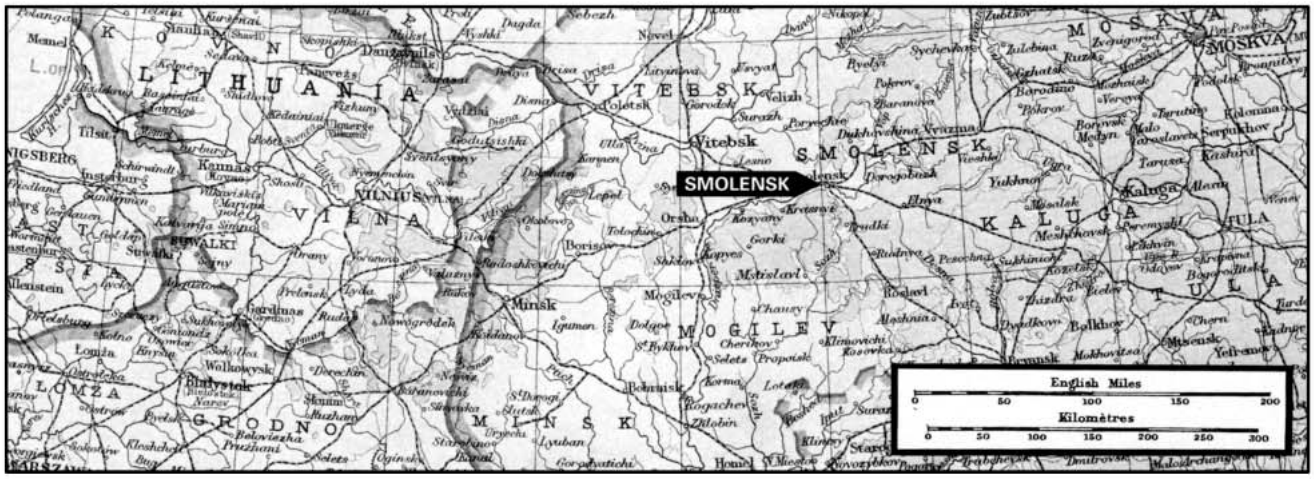
Militarily speaking, Smolensk is one of the main bastions on the road to Moscow. For any conqueror advancing from the West, the gap between the Dnieper and the Dvina rivers (flowing south to the Black Sea and north to the Baltic respectively) forms a natural corridor to Moscow. Smolensk, overlooking this strategic gateway from the south bank, is the fortress guarding its eastern exit. Just outside the city, Napoleon's army was defeated in a big battle with the Tsarist army under General Kutusov in 1812.

Smolensk again saw heavy fighting in the Second World War. On June 22, 1941, Hitler launched Operation 'Barbarossa', the German invasion of the Soviet Union, with three army groups. In the central sector, Heeresgruppe Mitte under Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock started a thrust toward Moscow via Minsk and Smolensk.

Leading the army group's lightning advance were two armoured spearheads, Panzergruppe 2 under Generaloberst Heinz Guderian (consisting of three armoured corps) on the right, and Panzergruppe 3 under Generaloberst Hermann Hoth (with two corps) on the left, with two infantry armies, the 4. and 9. Armee, following in the centre to mop up pockets of bypassed resistance. By the end of the first week, the two panzer groups had trapped some 324,000 Russian troops, 3,300 tanks and 1,800 guns in two gigantic pockets at Bialystok and west of Minsk. Even while these were being cleared, Guderian and Hoth resumed the advance to the east.

On June 29, General A.I. Jeremenko took over from the luckless General D.G. Pavlov as commander of the Soviet West Front army group (Stalin had Pavlov shot). Although the Soviets introduced new weapons — the T-34 tank, the Katusha multiple rocket-launcher, and the Molotov Cocktail — which slowed down the German onslaught, the panzers were still advancing a lightning 20 miles a day. By July 3, the two panzer groups, now combined into the 4. Panzerarmee under Generalfeldmarschall Günther von Kluge, had reached and crossed the Berezina, the last river barrier before the Dnieper and the historic graveyard of Napoleon's army.

On July 5, Guderian's point troops reached the Dnieper itself, below its southward bend. Smolensk was now less than 70 miles away. Von Kluge wanted Guderian to consolidate and wait for the infantry armies



The city of Smolensk in western Russia is one of the bastions guarding the historic route to Moscow from the west. Scene of many battles in the past, it again played a major role in the Second World War, both in the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, and during the 1943 Soviet counter-offensive.

Top: **Wehrmacht Propagandakompanieen photographer Büttner took this picture on August 21, 1941, a month after the Germans had captured the city. Wehrmacht direction signs adorn a knocked-out Soviet T-26 Model 1933 light tank while a German truck convoy pauses at the intersection. (RIOD)**

Smolensk lies astride the Dnieper river, with the historic part of the city built on the steep bluff of the south bank. Dominating the whole city is the world-famous Assumption Cathedral.

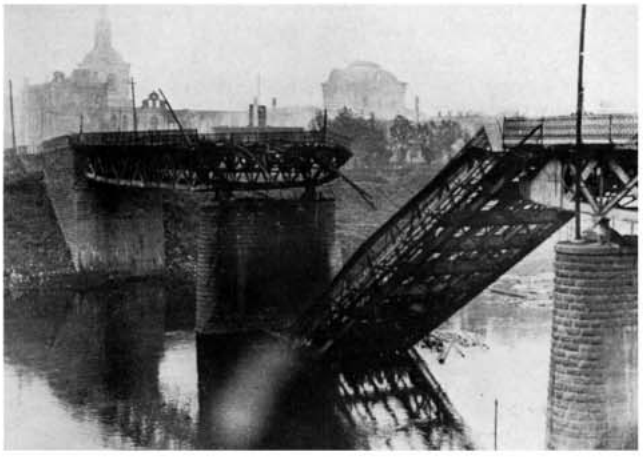
This picture shows the westernmost of Smolensk's two Dnieper bridges, blown by the Soviet defenders during the battle for the city of July 1941. (RIOD)

to catch up before attempting to cross, but Guderian insisted a delay would only give the Russians more time to build up their strength. The Soviets had deployed 42 fresh divisions along the river and initially succeeded in preventing the Germans from crossing. (On July 2, Marshal of the Soviet Union S.K. Timoshenko had been put above Jeremenko, assuming command of a reorganised West Front.) However, Guderian's troops probed for weak spots and between July 10-12 managed to cross the river in three places, bypassing the strong Soviet river bastions of Rogachev, Mogilev and Orsha. Further north, Hoth's Panzergruppe 2 entered the Dnieper-Dvina gap, not by the direct route, but by crossing the Dvina and then recrossing the river further east at Vitebsk, thus entering the land corridor through the back door.

Guderian's panzers raced toward Smolensk, with his XLVII. (mot.) Armeekorps (17. and 18. Panzer-Division and the motorised 29. Infanterie-Division) under General der Panzertruppen Joachim Lemelsen aiming for the city itself. Defending the Smolensk approach routes was the 16th Army under Lieutenant-General F.M. Lukin, who had been ordered to hold the city as long as possible to gain time. Lukin expected Guderian to attack from the south and massed his troops there, but instead Guderian came in from the south-west. Also, Lukin's army had to fight without any proper air support. By July 15, XLVII. (mot.) Armeekorps had reached the south-western edge of Smolensk, and early on the 16th, the 29. (mot.) Infanterie-Division (Generalleutnant Walter von Boltenstern) stormed the city.

The attack was launched at 4 a.m. from the south with two regiments abreast: Infanterie-Regiment 15 with Artillerie-Gruppe Jauer on the left, and Infanterie-Regiment 71 with Artillerie-Gruppe Broeren on the right. Initially, the attack met little resistance, but as the Germans got nearer the Dnieper, Soviet artillery began shelling them from the north bank and opposition stiffened. The

For lack of water transport, our comparison was taken closer in, from the actual bridge itself. Smolensk's other Dnieper bridge is visible below the cathedral.



Left: **This second bridge connects the main part of the town with the main market and the railway station on the north bank. The German 29. (mot.) Infanterie-Division assaulted the city from the south on July 16 and methodically battled its way through the city. As the Soviet defenders retreated to the north bank, they blew the bridge behind them. (RIOD)** *Right:* **A new bridge now spans the river, but the same church still overlooks it from the north bank.**

The entrenched Soviet defenders fought stubbornly and had to be rooted out house by house. After the Germans had captured the town on July 16, Soviet artillery continued to pound it for another two weeks. This scene of destruction was pictured right in the centre of Smolensk, in the small park on the corner of the Ploschad Smirnova main crossroads.

remaining Soviet defenders — regular troops, worker militias and security police troops — had entrenched themselves and had to be cleared out house by house and street by street. Flame-throwing tanks of Panzer-Abteilung 100 supported the German infantry in rooting them out. By mid-afternoon, the Germans had reached the south bank of the river. At 4 p.m., both regiments assaulted across in rubber storm boats. Earlier, at 10 a.m. that morning, a motorcycle company of Kradschützen-Bataillon 29 had already captured the railway bridge just to the east of Smolensk in a surprise action, and this was used to put tanks, SPs and more infantry across the river. Fighting on the north bank was as fierce as on the south bank. Again, each street had to be taken house by house. By 5.30 p.m., Infanterie-Regiment 15 had taken the railway station. By 7 p.m., the huge barracks area on the northern edge of the town had been cleared. Smolensk was in German hands.

However, the larger battle was not yet over. Large Soviet forces remained to the west and east and along the Moscow highway just to the north of the city. For ten days, Guderian struggled to keep them from escaping to the south or east, meanwhile trying to make contact with Panzergruppe Hoth coming down from the north-west, and staving off Timoshenko's counter-attacks from the south and east.

Only on July 26 did XXXIX. (mot.) Armeekorps of Hoth's force cut the old Smolensk-Moscow road at Falkovitchi north-east of the city, thereby finally closing the Smolensk pocket. Some 24 Soviet divisions had been trapped by the panzer spearheads. From the west, the 2. (former 4.) Armee and 9. Armee advanced to methodically clear the various encircled areas. On the night of July 26/27, the 137. Infanterie-Division of IX. Armeekorps relieved the 29. (mot.) Infanterie-Division at Smolensk, which was still threatened by the Soviet counter-attacks. Even though they were now encircled, Lukin's 16th Army recaptured the Smolensk railway station on the 27th while another army, the 20th, reached the eastern suburbs. It took till August 5 before all Russian resistance had ceased. In all, the Red Army lost another 310,000 troops, over 3,200 tanks and 3,100 guns in the Smolensk pocket.

The building on the right is one of the town's main hotels, formerly the Hotel Molotov but today named the Hotel Smolensk. During the July 16 battle, Generalleutnant Walter von Boltenstern, commander of the 29. Infanterie-Division, had his command post there. (RIOD)

Wehrmacht staff cars climb up Ulitsa Bolshaya Sovietskaya from the Dnieper bridge on July 31, 1941. In the background is the Smolensk cathedral, unscathed after the ferocious fighting and shelling of the past month. (RIOD)

Smolensk today has grown to a city of 340,000. Beautifully restored, the historic centre is still very scenic, although few visitors spend more than a night here as they speed between Poland and Moscow along the motorway just to the north.

Twenty-five months later, the tide of war had turned and the Red Army was inexorably pushing the Wehrmacht back to the west. In the aftermath of the Kursk tank battle of July-August 1943, the Soviets were advancing to the Dnieper on a broad front. Aiming for Smolensk were two army groups, West Front under Colonel-General V. D. Sokolovskii and Kalinin Front under Colonel-General A.I Yeremenko.

The Stavka, the Soviet High Command, had planned a combined offensive. West Front would attack Elnya to open the road to Roslavl, while its right wing cooperated with the left wing of Kalinin Front to capture Yartsevo and then push on to Smolensk. From there, both army groups would drive on deep into Belorussia. Marshal of the Soviet Union P.N. Voronov acted as Stavka coordinator of the Smolensk operations.

Still holding the German front in this central sector was Heeresgruppe Mitte, now commanded by von Kluge, with its armies virtually the same as in 1941: from north to south, 3. Panzerarmee, 4. Armee, 9. Armee and 2. Armee. Defending the front directly east of Smolensk was 4. Armee under Generaloberst Gotthard Heinrici, a precise strategist and a specialist on tough, stubborn defence battles. From north to south, Heinrici had four corps: XXVII. Armeekorps, XXXIX. Panzerkorps, IX. and XII. Armeekorps, in all a mere 11 divisions and 7 Kampfgruppen.

The Smolensk offensive opened on August 7, when Sokolovskii's West Front attacked with three armies — 5th Army, 10th Guards Army and 33rd Army — soon reinforced by the reserve 68th Army. The German troops were ready and waiting and, in general, Soviet progress was slow. On August 22, the Stavka directed Voronov to have West Front abandon its Roslavl thrust and regroup for a concentrated attack via Elnya toward Smolensk.

To the north, Kalinin Front opened its attack on August 13 with two armies, the 39th and 43rd, but their progress was equally disappointing. Yeremenko renewed his efforts on August 23, but again with little noticeable gains. Here too, the Stavka intervened to call a halt.

The second phase began on August 28. Sokolovskii had used the six-day pause to concentrate two armies, the 10th Guards and 21st, in an 18-mile sector, their breakout planned along a ten-mile front. Preceded by a heavy ground and air bombardment, the attack hit the boundary of 4. and 9. Armee, and in two days drove a 20-mile-deep wedge through to Elnya, forcing the German armies to bend back their flanks to keep contact. It seemed that with a little determination West Front would quickly push past Elnya to Smolensk and enter the Dvina—Dnieper gap, the strategic 'land bridge' into Belorussia.

Meanwhile, further south, other Soviet attacks ripped through Heeresgruppe Mitte's southern sector, forcing the 9. and 2. Armee into a general retreat. However, the Stavka had realised it could not sustain simultaneous advances into Belorussia and the Ukraine further south, and on September 4 committed itself to a main effort in the Ukraine against Heeresgruppe Süd. The offensive against Heeresgruppe Mitte subsided momentarily.

Obviously, the famous Russian orthodox cathedral featured heavily in the German propaganda photographs. Built in the late 17th and early 18th century, on the site of an earlier cathedral dating back to the 11th century, its white and bright-green outside colours are as spectacular as its gilded interior.

Napoleon is said to have been so impressed that he set a guard to stop his own men vandalising it. After the 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks had made it into a 'Museum of Godlessness', so the Germans were quick to reap profit from reverting it to a house of religion. (RIOD)

Left: **In August 1941, the Germans sent a group of foreign correspondents to Smolensk to refute Allied reports that the town was still in Soviet hands. One of them was Alwin Steinkopf of the Berlin office of Associated Press who took this picture of Wehrmacht soldiers enjoying the view from the cathedral steps. (RIOD)** *Right:* **Few tourists today, but the steps remain unchanged. A church service was in progress when Karel took his shot on a frosty Saturday morning in October 1995.**

This gave Sokolovskii time to build up his forces for the third and final stage of the Smolensk attack: his centre would attack the city directly, the right was to aim for Roslavl, the left to cooperate with Kalinin Front and destroy German forces in the Yartsevo area. The Germans were well aware of the onslaught awaiting them. On September 9, von Kluge told OKH: 'The door to Smolensk now stands open'.

On September 14, at a conference with von Kluge at the Führerhauptquartier, Hitler agreed that Heeresgruppe Mitte fall back to the so-called 'Panther' position, a defence line running east of the upper Dnieper but west of Smolensk. Von Kluge was to execute a slow, phased withdrawal. To accomplish this, the 4. Armee had prepared a series of seven intermediate stop lines, each about 10 miles to the rear of the other. Smolensk lay between the third and fourth of these lines, code-named 'Hubertus III' and 'Clara' respectively.

Hitler's decision, with which von Kluge concurred, gave the Stavka an opportunity to continue developing its offensive thrust toward Smolensk. The final attack opened on September 15. The next day, Yartsevo fell. Masking the Dnieper-Dvina gap in front of Smolensk, Heinrici's 4. Armee was pushed back on both flanks: south-east of the city, West Front forced its right wing back; north of the city, Kalinin Front did the same with its left wing, boring down on both sides of the army's boundary with 3. Panzerarmee.

These disastrous developments forced von Kluge to abandon his plans for a leisurely withdrawal. Faced with a collapsing front, he had no choice but to quickly retreat his troops into the 'Panther' position. By September 24, the Soviet 5th, 31st and 68th Armies had bypassed Smolensk to the south. They launched a night attack on the city from the south-west. That same night, the 4. Armee units further north withdrew from the 'Hubertus III' to the 'Clara' line, thereby giving up Smolensk. The last formations withdrawing through the city were the 52. Infanterie-Division of XXVII. Armeekorps and 18. Panzergrenadier-Division of XXXIX. Panzerkorps. As they pulled out, the Germans set the ancient city to the torch. Five miles to the north, combat engineers of the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division of XXVII. Armeekorps blew up the main intersection of the Moscow motorway, the 'Rollbahn'. By the morning of September 25, the last German troops had cleared the city. Although ravaged by fire, Smolensk was again in Russian hands.

The German occupation of Smolensk lasted just over two years. From August 1943, two Soviet army groups — West Front under General Sokolovskii and Kalinin Front under General Yeremenko — were methodically pushing the German armies away from Moscow. Although the Germans managed to hold the Soviet offensive twice, by late September the Russian armies had bypassed Smolensk in the north and south, forcing the Germans to pull out on the night of September 24/25. Smolensk was again free. (RIOD)

Above and right: **When the German 4. Armee was forced to give up Smolensk in September 1943, the army commander, Generaloberst Gotthard Heinrici, had instructions 'to burn and lay waste every habitable building'. A devout Protestant, Heinrici however refrained from setting fire to the famous cathedral, something which led Göring to complain to Hitler that Heinrici had failed to carry out the Führer's scorched earth order. Heinrici avoided a court-martial by explaining that 'had Smolensk been fired I could not have withdrawn my troops through it', an argument which just carried enough military logic to get him off the hook. (RIOD)** *Below left:* **Still, although the cathedral was saved, the Germans did set fire to many other buildings and large parts of the town were left in ashes. The intact building in the right-hand background is the Smolensk concert hall. (RIOD)** *Below right:* **Survivor of the 1941 battle, and restored after the ravages of the 1943 battles, it still stands on Ulitsa Glinki. Picture taken from the town park.**

MUTINY IN THE COCOS ISLANDS

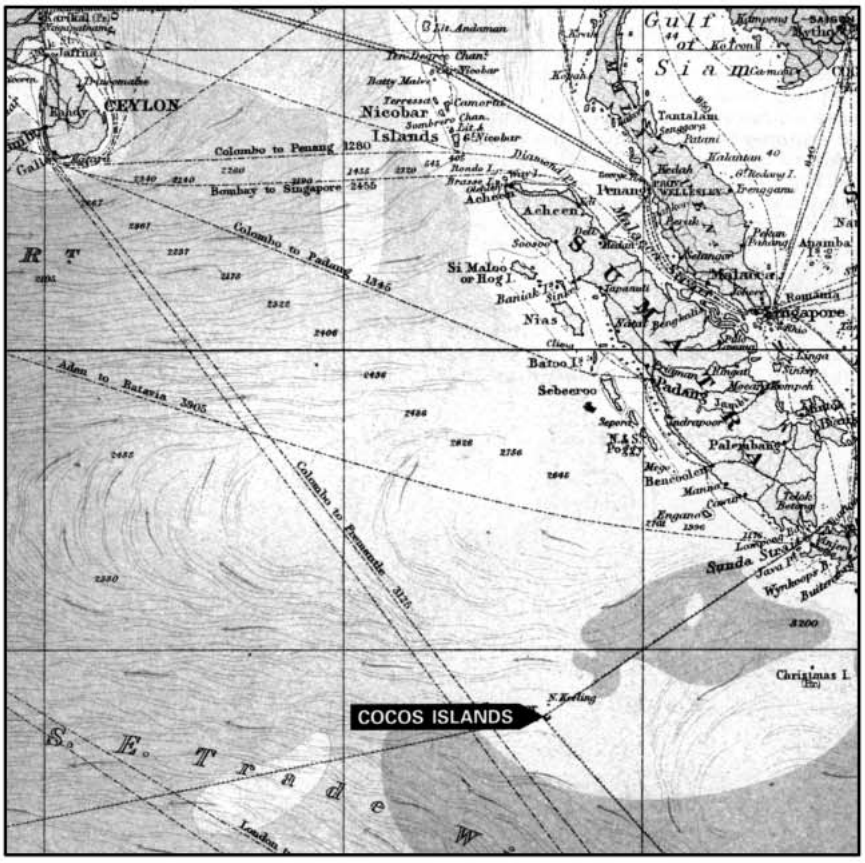
By Wing Cdr Derek Martin

The earliest record in the history of the Keeling-Cocos group of islands in the Indian Ocean occurs in the log of William Keeling, merchant and seaman, who discovered them in 1609. Thereafter, the atolls remained uninhabited — although visited on occasion by small parties — until 1827, when John Clunies-Ross established a colony on the Cocos Atoll with labour imported from the countries of the Far East.

In establishing his trading station, Ross instituted what was probably the first social security scheme the world had ever known; all the inhabitants worked for Ross who, in return, guaranteed their food, shelter, clothing and necessities. Ross's title to the islands was confirmed by Queen Victoria, and later, as the colonial system developed, responsibility for the islands was vested in the Straits Settlements.

In the spring of 1942, the tide of Japanese invasion had engulfed the Straits Settlements and, as Japanese ships and aircraft ranged the Indian Ocean, responsibility for the islands was transferred to the Government of Ceylon.

The 27 islands which make up Cocos — also sometimes referred to as the Keeling Islands after the mariner who first discovered them — lie in the east Indian Ocean, some 1,300 miles south-east of Ceylon. They were claimed as a British possession in 1857, but in 1886 they were granted in perpetuity to the Clunies-Ross family who had settled the islands in 1827. Although this grant was still honoured when jurisdiction over the islands was transferred to Australia in 1955, there was increasing criticism of the 'anachronistic and feudal' relationship between the owner and the inhabitants. This led to a United Nations inspection in 1974, and by 1978 agreement had been reached with John Clunies-Ross for the outright purchase of the islands by Australia.



The islands main claim to fame during the First World War was the sinking of the German cruiser *Emden* on the shore of Keeling Island by the Australian cruiser *Sydney*. During the Second World War, the islands came under the GOC Ceylon although his command was a five-day journey away by sea. In 1941, the defences for the cable and wireless station on Direction Island (in the background) were reinforced by the emplacement on Horsburgh Island of two 6-inch guns from the Ceylon Garrison Artillery. They were manned by personnel shipped to the island from Ceylon.

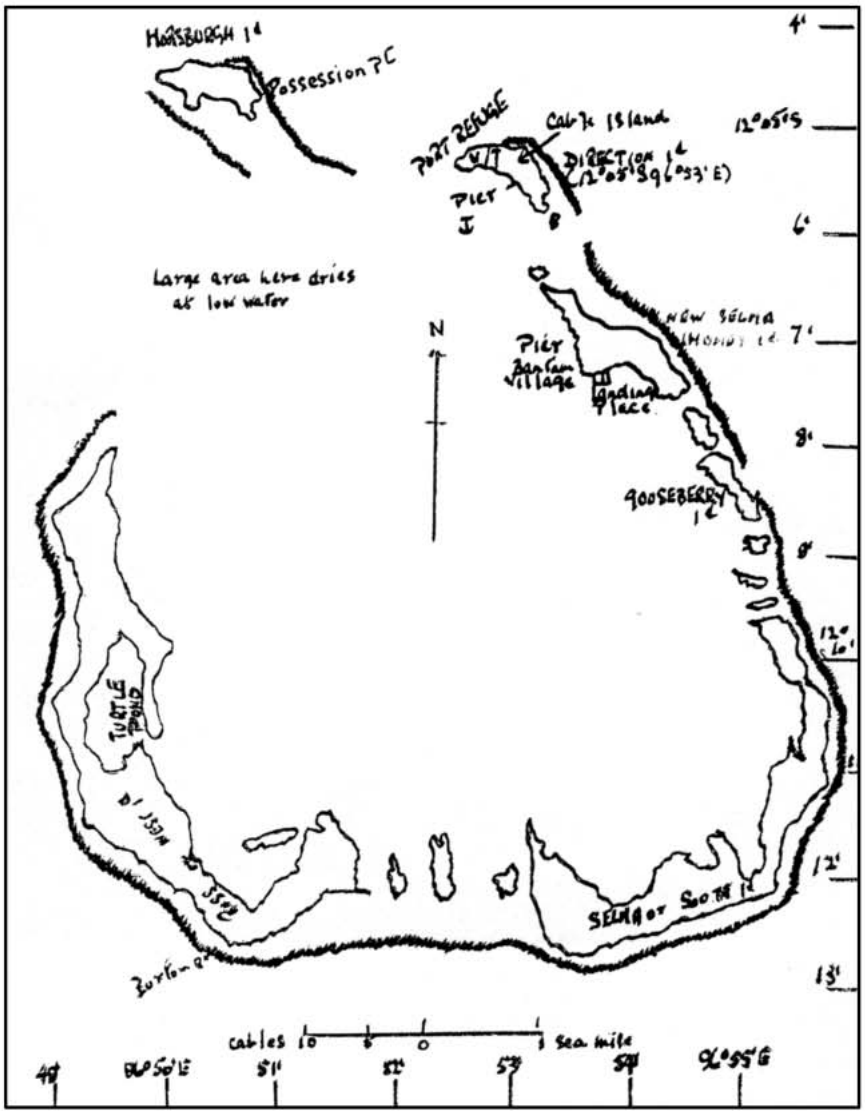
On March 9, Java was captured by the Japanese and air attacks were carried out against Ceylon on April 5 and 9. During the first few days of April, there were five or six Japanese battleships loose in the Indian Ocean; Japan had command of the sea and about 116,000 tons of Allied shipping were sunk.

Churchill was seriously considering that Ceylon might be lost and with it the important base at Trincomalee. Consequently, Addu Atoll, a small island about 600 miles from Ceylon, was being built up as an alternative base for the Royal Navy.

While these great events were taking place, a small force from the Ceylon Garrison Artillery was assembled and shipped some 1,500 miles to the Cocos Islands. It seems that they were all volunteers. To anyone who knew the larger picture, this was not an attractive assignment with the likelihood of being sunk on the way and capture or death after arrival on an island remote from friendly forces and totally without facilities.

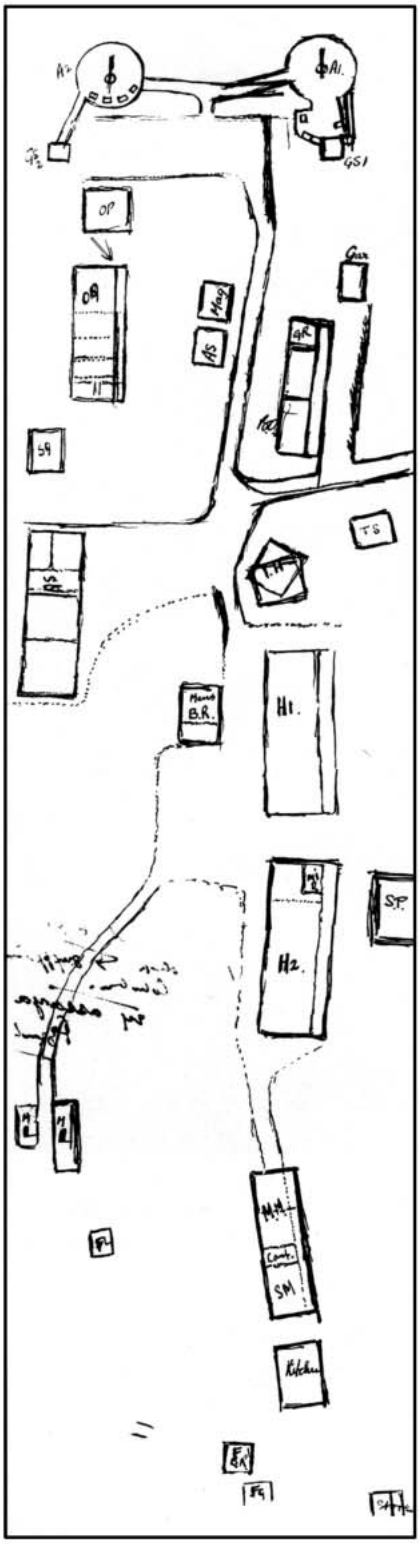
By 1944, it was vital that a staging airfield be provided somewhere on the 3,000-mile route from Ceylon to Australia. With so much of the Far East in Japanese hands, and Christmas Island, 600 miles to the eastward, too mountainous, West Island in the Cocos group was evaluated as the best choice. However, as the construction of a landing strip would necessitate the felling of thousands of coconut trees (on which the islands' prosperity depended), compensation had to be paid to the Cluniess-Ross estate for the consequent loss of income. Then, when the stores ships were unloaded, it was found that a large amount of equipment had been pilfered in transit, some packing cases being completely empty! Work finally began on a 2,500-yard runway on April 7, 1945, the first aircraft landing on May 28. Our author, Wing Commander Derek Martin (front row left), was Chief-of-Staff to Air Commodore A. W. Hunt at the Joint-Service Force Headquarters on Cocos in 1945, but so closely-guarded have been the facts surrounding the mutiny which took place there in 1942, that when we contacted him in August 1995, he had no knowledge of the affair at all.

It was only when the appropriate War Office file (WO71/741) became available for inspection at the Public Record Office in May 1994 that the full story of the mutiny became known. Let the ringleader, Bombardier G. H. Fernando, describe his plan in his own words: 'The whole thing was planned with a purpose. Captain Gardiner was just an obstacle. I just wanted to break away from the white people. I am not so much anti-British as anti-white. I have felt this for a very long time. I was not doing it for my own sake. I had not the least grudge against Captain Gardiner personally. I would have done the same to any white man. I felt that if I succeeded I might do things that would revolutionise the war effort in the East. I wanted to try and get Japanese help. I firmly believe in Asia for the Asiatics. I am in sympathy with Japanese war aims. . . . I had Gunner Anandappa and Gunner Gauder in my confidence. They knew my plans. My plan was to disarm the Guard. I ordered my sentry to shoot the Night Officer on duty. I went up the O.P. I fired a shot. Someone ran up. I shot at him. I tried to get the tommy gun. Could not fix the magazine — so put it under cover. I doubled to the Bren gun which I had already put near the battery gate outside. I wanted to pick off the men as they got bunched coming into the gate. I thought when I fired the first burst of the Bren I had got Captain Gardiner. I meant to send the alarm to Direction by the Secret Code. They would have sent an S.O.S. I have studied the Direction Island defences and felt I could have overcome them. I could have sent a message, as from the CO asking for say ten men in the morning and could have dealt with them. With about eight men from Horsburgh I could have overcome the remaining C.L.I. on Direction Island. . . . I did not want to kill them. I wanted to destroy the cable station and R.N.D.F. station. . . . If I was successful I think I might have been helped by Lance Bombardier Diasz, Gunners Peries, Daniels, Hamilton, G. B. de Silva, and Hopman.'



It was not a happy contingent which left the comfort of Ceylon to guard the Cocos Islands. Gunner G. D. Anandappa said that on the journey out (which would have taken 5-7 days) the food was bad and there was little water. They had to sleep amongst the poultry with its bad smells. The Battery Quartermaster Sergeant was already showing favouritism towards the men of Battenburg Battery and this partiality continued when they reached Cocos where there was a shortage of cigarettes and soft drinks. About the middle of April, Bombardier G. H. Fernando declared: 'I feel like shooting some of the officers' but, as Anandappa said later, he was always talking like that.

We sent this sketch plan to Dr Martin Mowbray, the present-day administrator on Cocos, and he kindly arranged for Matthew Bryson to take a party over to the now-uninhabited Horsburgh Island to see what remained of Battery Rowe. However, being in the cyclone belt, one could not hold out much hope.



'It seems that the only recognisable parts of the battery left are the guns (of which one is in two pieces and both may have been moved), a couple of rises and a rusting well', wrote Matthew after his visit. 'The single, whole gun on the water's edge is to the south-east of the other, inland, gun, the barrel of which is 50-100 metres further west. Even when using the hand-drawn map [*above* from the court-martial file] as a guide, our party had great difficulty in matching up the details with the site (see picture page 48). It seems that between the destruction by the weather, and the evacuation, there is not a lot left on Horsburgh Island.

Lieutenant H. F. Stephens stated that on the night of May 8/9, 1942, he was in the officers' war shelter at Rowe Battery as duty officer. 'After I fell asleep after visiting rounds, I was aroused by Gunner R. A. V. Perera. He spoke to me through the window in the wall between the Guard Room and the officers' war shelter. He told me that all small arms and ammunition had been removed and that all the guards were locked in the Guard Room. I went to the entrance of the Guard Room. It was latched from outside, the padlock being open. I opened the door and asked what the trouble was. The Guard Room was in darkness. They all said the rifles and S.A.A. had been removed. . . . As I turned the corner I saw somebody coming round the bend. It was Gunner Gauder coming towards me with his rifle under his arm pointing in my direction. He was about two yards away when I spoke to him. I called his name. He fired a round at me. The bullet grazed my right cheekbone just below my eye. I fired my revolver where the flash came from. He fired another round at me. I fired back. I think Gauder fired four or five rounds at me. I fired five rounds. As I had only one round left, I took cover in the camouflage by the OP. I was wounded in my left leg, the bullet passing through. . . . I heard two bursts of Bren gun fire. After some time I heard the voice of Bombardier G. H. Fernando calling out. I also heard him shout several times: "Captain Gardiner to the battery". From my cover I saw Fernando come into the magazine and look for me. He then went away. . . . I stayed under cover till daylight when I heard the voices of Corporal Ferdinands and Sergeant I. L. Pereira. I decided to come out of cover and met Captain Gardiner at the magazine entrance. I told him that Gunner Gauder had fired at me.'

Although he had enlisted voluntarily in the Ceylon Defence Force, Fernando had a complex as far as white people were concerned. In his evidence to the Field General Court-Martial, which was convened by Captain G. Gardiner (his superior officer) on Cocos as he was entitled to do, after the mutiny of May 8/9, 1942, Fernando said: 'I am not so much anti-British as anti-white. I do not have the least grudge against Captain Gardiner personally. I would have done the same to any white man. I felt that if I succeeded [in the mutiny] I might do things that would revolutionise the war effort in the East. I wanted to try and get Japanese help. I am in sympathy with the Japanese war aims.'

In his statement before the court-martial, Fernando said that he 'came to Cocos because he wanted to get out of Galle Face Battery [in Ceylon]'. In his statement in mitigation after conviction, he said: 'My mind was deranged . . . I volunteered for Cocos because I had some unhappiness in Ceylon over domestic and a love affair.'

Fernando also had an obsession about race. He had questioned Gunner K. R. Porritt about his nationality. Porritt told him that his father was a European and his mother a Eurasian. Porritt said that Fernando had also asked Gunner M. C. J. W. de Rooy the same question. Fernando gained some support from some others in the battery: Gunners C. A. Gauder, Anandappa, and R. S. Hamilton who were later found guilty of all charges.

Mutiny seems to have been under discussion for about a month before it started. Fernando's chance came when he was appointed commander of the guard of Rowe Battery on the night of May 8/9. His own statement outlined what he hoped to do: 'My plan was to disarm the guard. I ordered my sentry to shoot the Night Officer on duty [Lieutenant H. F. Stephens]. I went to the OP. Someone ran up. I shot at him. I doubled to the Bren gun which I had already put near the battery gate outside. I wanted to pick off the men as they got bunched coming into the gate. I thought when I had fired the first burst of the Bren gun that I had got Captain Gardiner.'

The attempt to take the battery, led by Fernando, the Guard Commander, created a night of confusion. Gauder shot at Lieutenant Stephens. Fernando fired the Bren at Captain Gardiner and wounded him, but not seriously. Gunner G. B. de Silva shot and killed Gunner M. S. D. S. Jayasekera. However, in his evidence, de Silva said he had been ordered by the Guard Commander [Fernando] to go to the top of the OP. While he was there, he heard a shot followed by footsteps coming up the stairs. He challenged the intruder who continued up to the top step, so de Silva shot him. It turned out to be Jayasekera.

In his evidence, Gunner Hamilton said that Fernando was the main cause of all the trouble. Fernando had the Bren gun. Gunner de Silva asked Hamilton to kill Lieutenant Stephens but Hamilton said that he could not do that. Later, de Silva saw Gunner Gauder shoot and wound Lieutenant Stephens.

Fernando had told his fellow conspirators that they must take the battery by killing both officers and all the senior NCOs. They should also kill the Cable & Wireless staff on Direction Island and then send a message to the Japanese telling them to come and destroy this place [Cocos].

During the shooting, Lance Sergeant O. M. D. W. Perera and Sergeant I. L. Pereira apparently got into the battery enclosure at the first alarm yet there is no evidence to show that from their favourable position they took any action during the following hours to restore order.

On May 12, 1942, three days after the event, 15 men were arraigned before a Field General Court-Martial charged with the capital offence of mutiny. There were three alleged offences: 1. Causing a mutiny; 2. Joining a mutiny; 3. Failing to report an impending mutiny. Fernando, Gauder, de Silva, Hamilton, Anandappa and Lance Bombardier K. W. J. Diasz were found guilty of all charges. Others were found guilty of lesser charges and Gunners L. B. de Zilva, T. B. Kronenberg, D. A. Patterson and F. J. Daniels were found not guilty of any of the charges. The death penalty was confirmed on three of the mutineers: Fernando, the ringleader, who was seen by Sergeant Pereira firing a Bren gun at Captain Gardiner; Gauder who fired shots at Lieutenant Stephens wounding him; and G. B. de Silva who shot and killed Jayasekera.

After the court-martial, the convicted were given the opportunity to petition the GOC Ceylon before he made his final decision as confirming officer. They were assisted in the preparation of their statements by Lieutenant-Colonel M. Joseph, formerly a Colombo magistrate.

Documents on the trial released in the Public Record Office in May 1994 refer to legal matters associated with the court-martial. As it was a Field General Court-Martial, the accused had no defending officers. Gunner M. A. Hopman alleged that he believed the court-martial to be a 'preliminary enquiry' and he claimed that he had not been allowed to make notes to assist him in his own defence. Hopman said that 'some men' had met beforehand in the magazine. There was grumbling and dissatisfaction about life on the island. Gunners Anandappa, Elders and Porritt said that there had been 'a lot of bad feeling that the Battenburg personnel were getting preferential treatment'.

After the war, Gunner Jayasekera, shot by Gunner G. B. de Silva was transferred to Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore (Plot 46, Row C, Grave 13). (Peter MacMillan)

STATEMENT SHOWING CHARGES AND FINDINGS
AGAINST THE UNDERMENTIONED INDIVIDUALS OF 1ST COAST REGIMENT, CEYLON GARRISON ARTILLERY.

Serial No.	Regtl No. Rank and Name.	Charges.	Finding.	Sentence.
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1.	1712 Bdr G.H. FERNANDO	(1) Causing or conspiring with persons to cause a mutiny. (2) Joining a mutiny. (3) After coming to the knowledge of an intended mutiny failing to inform without delay their C.O. of the same.	Guilty on all 3 charges.	Death.
2.	2002 Gnr C.A. GAUDER		Guilty on all 3 charges.	Death.
3.	1969 Gnr G.E. De SILVA		Guilty on all 3 charges.	Death.
4.	2028 Gnr R.S. HAMILTON		Guilty on all 3 charges.	Death.
5.	1765 Gnr G.D. ANANDAPPA		Guilty on all 3 charges.	Death.
6.	1971 L/Bdr K.W.J. DIASZ		Guilty on all 3 charges.	Death.
7.	2190 Gnr A.J.L. PEIRIS		Guilty on charges 1 and 3.	Death.
8.	1727 Gnr L.B. De ZILVA		Not guilty on any charge.	Acquitted.
9.	2152 Gnr A.B. EDEMA		Guilty on charge 3.	One year's imprisonment with hard labour.
10.	2154 Gnr T.B. KRONEMBERG		Not guilty on any charge.	Acquitted.
11.	2022 Gnr M.A. HOPMAN		Guilty on charge 3.	Three years penal survitude.
12.	2147 Gnr D.A. PATTERSON		Not guilty on any charge.	Acquitted.
13.	2159 Gnr F.J. DANIELS		Guilty on charges 1 and 3.	Seven years penal suvitude.
14.	1996 Gnr K.R. PORRITT		Guilty on charge 3.	One years imprisonment with hard labour.
15.	2055 Gnr S.H. De ZILVA		Not guilty on any charge.	Acquitted.

On May 12, Captain Gardiner convened a Field General Court-Martial with himself as President and Lieutenants H. de Sylva and S. K. Menon as Members. Fifteen soldiers were arraigned before the court which gave its judgement four days later.

Lance Bombardier Diasz complained that some of the witnesses at the court-martial were also guards who had heard the evidence of the other witnesses before they themselves gave evidence. Diasz said: 'I was convicted on evidence or statements that were not made before me and which I did not have the opportunity of denying or proving false by cross-examination'. Gunner A. B. Edema confirmed Diasz's statement.

Gunner A. J. L. Peries complained that 'I did not have a fair trial. Two days after I had been arrested when I was taken before Captain G. Gardiner I asked what the charge was against me. He replied: "That is nothing to do with you." Lieutenant H. de Sylva, a member of the court-martial, often interrupted when evidence was being interpreted and gave his own interpretation which was sometimes wrong'.

On July 22, 1942, General Sir Archibald Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief India, approved the sentence of death by hanging of 1712 Bombardier G. H. Fernando, 1989 Gunner G. B. de Silva, and 2002 Gunner C. A. Gauder, all members of the Ceylon Garrison Artillery. They were hanged on August 5, 1942, the only members of the British armed forces to be executed for mutiny during the Second World War.

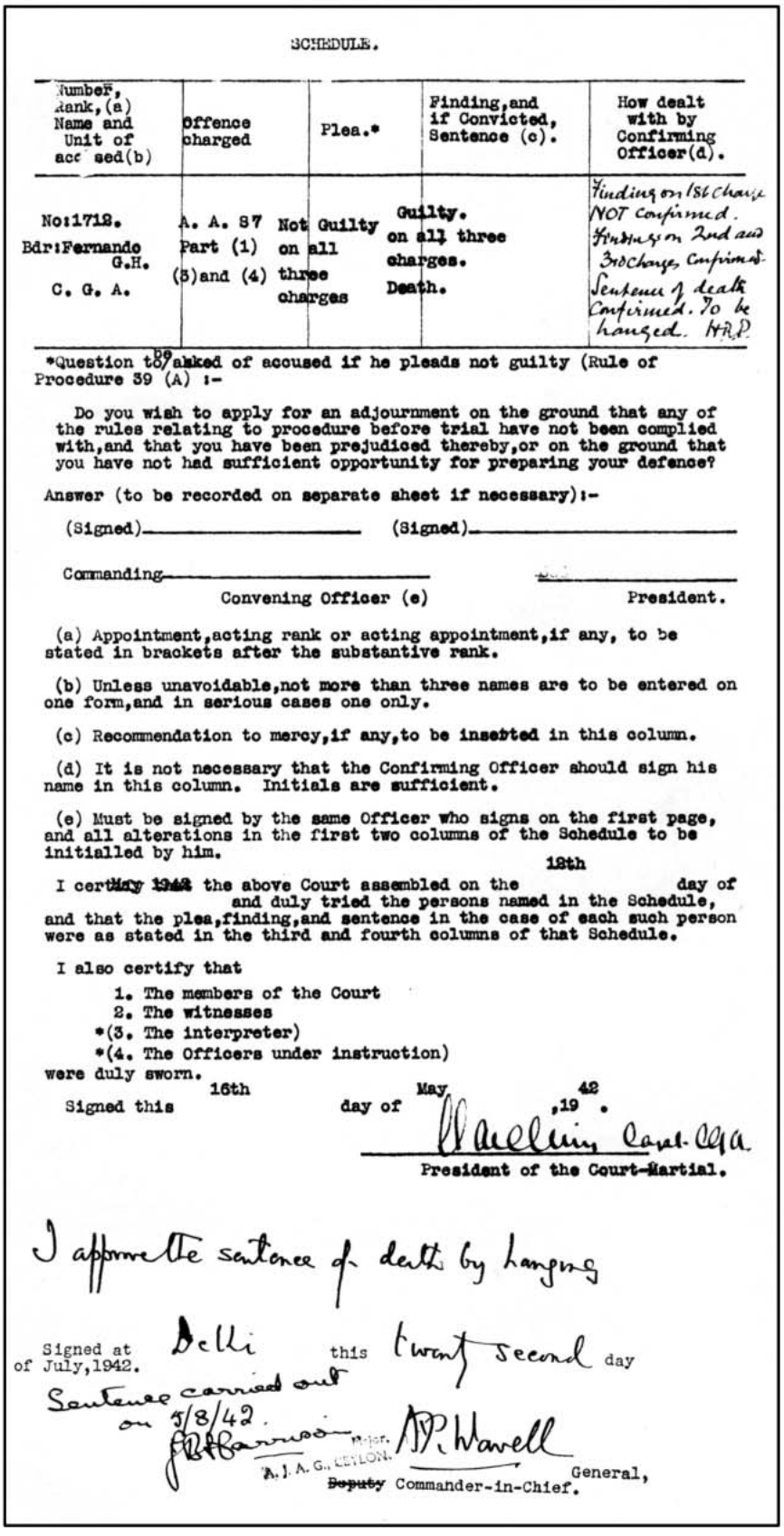
A report on the trial was prepared by the Assistant Judge Advocate General (JAG) in Ceylon and submitted to Army Command HQ on June 7. Many weaknesses were apparent in the proceedings but, the report said, most were due to circumstances existing at the place of the offence and that it was for just such circumstances that most of the ordinary rules of procedure could be dispensed with at a trial by Field General Court-Martial. However, the JAG ruled that the convictions on the first charge (causing or conspiring with persons to cause a mutiny) should be set aside because 'it has been held that corroboration by another accomplice, or even by several accomplices, does not suffice'. Likewise, it was ruled that the sworn and signed statements by the accused were inadmissible. Although death sentences had been given by the court to seven of the mutineers, the JAG recommended that it only be carried out in the case of three, summarised by the JAG as follows:

'Bdr FERNANDO. **The chief ringleader and undoubtedly the man who caused the mutiny, but the conviction on this charge (causing or conspiring with others to cause) must be set aside. His own evidence at the trial, however, is quite sufficient to convict him on the other two charges without his attached statement. In fact, his evidence goes much further than his statement and the admission of the latter in no way prejudiced him.**

'Gnr G. B. de SILVA. **In his evidence he admits shooting at some person in the OP. Gnr Subrananian states that he saw this accused shooting at Gnr Jayasekera who was killed. This, with other points in the accused's own evidence, is sufficient to convict him of joining in the mutiny and of having had previous knowledge of it and not reporting it. I suggest confirmation of the convictions on the 2nd and 3rd charges and, because he actually killed a man, that the sentence of death also be confirmed.**

'Gnr C. A. GAUDER. **In his evidence this accused says "I took part in the mutiny". Lt Stephens says definitely that Gauder fired four or five shots at him from a range of about two yards after he had spoken to him. One bullet grazed Lt Stephens' face and another wounded him in the leg. It appears certain that Gauder meant to kill Lt Stephens. Other evidence makes it clear that Gauder had previous knowledge of the intended mutiny. I suggest that because of this accused's deliberate attempt to shoot his officer, that the sentence of death also be confirmed.'**

The sentences on Fernando, de Silva, and Gauder, were approved by General Wavell, Commander-in-Chief India, on July 22, 1942 by which time the convicted men would have been lodged in prison in Colombo. The sentences were carried out on August 5 and, as none of the men are commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (as are some servicemen executed in Britain — see *After the Battle* No. 45), one presumes that they were dismissed from the service before execution.



SCHEDULE.

Number, Rank, (a) Name and Unit of accused(b)	Offence charged	Plea.*	Finding, and if Convicted, Sentence (c).	How dealt with by Confirming Officer(d).
No:1712. Bdr:Fernando G.H. C. G. A.	A. A. S7 Part (1) (3)and (4)	Not Guilty on all three charges	Guilty. on all three charges. Death.	Finding on 1st Charge NOT confirmed. Findings on 2nd and 3rd Charge, Confirmed. Sentence of death Confirmed. To be hanged. H.R.P.

*Question to be asked of accused if he pleads not guilty (Rule of Procedure 39 (A) :-

Do you wish to apply for an adjournment on the ground that any of the rules relating to procedure before trial have not been complied with, and that you have been prejudiced thereby, or on the ground that you have not had sufficient opportunity for preparing your defence?

Answer (to be recorded on separate sheet if necessary):-

(Signed)_____ (Signed)_____

Commanding_____

Convening Officer (c) President.

(a) Appointment, acting rank or acting appointment, if any, to be stated in brackets after the substantive rank.

(b) Unless unavoidable, not more than three names are to be entered on one form, and in serious cases one only.

(c) Recommendation to mercy, if any, to be inserted in this column.

(d) It is not necessary that the Confirming Officer should sign his name in this column. Initials are sufficient.

(e) Must be signed by the same Officer who signs on the first page, and all alterations in the first two columns of the Schedule to be initialled by him.

I certify that the above Court assembled on the 18th day of May 1942 and duly tried the persons named in the Schedule, and that the plea, finding, and sentence in the case of each such person were as stated in the third and fourth columns of that Schedule.

I also certify that

1. The members of the Court
2. The witnesses
*(3. The interpreter)
*(4. The Officers under instruction)

were duly sworn.

Signed this 16th day of May ,1942.

Wavell, Capt. A.D.C.

President of the Court-Martial.

I approve the sentence of death by hanging

Signed at Delhi this twenty second day of July, 1942.

Sentence carried out on 5/8/42.

J.B. Bannerman Major. A.J.A.G. CEYLON.

A.P. Wavell General, Deputy Commander-in-Chief.